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IMAGINING WITH WORDS: THE TEMPORAL PROCESSES OF READING FICTION

by

Margaret Mackey ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of Secondary Education

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1995

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For my mother and father,
Elizabeth and Sherburne McCurdy

- one small thank-you for a lifetime of support and encouragement

ABSTRACT

Readers explore fictional texts in ways which are learned and conventional and simultaneously in ways which are personal and idiosyncratic. A text enables and constrains readings in ways which are also both conventional and individual.

This study explores the interaction between the conventional and the personal in fiction reading. It uses a particular literary text, the young adult novel *Wolf* by Gillian Cross, and analyzes some of the many different levels of that story. The study records the responses of ten specific adolescent readers, aged between 14 and 17, in their first and second encounters with the opening chapters of that book.

These readers' responses to the novel are investigated using a multi-disciplinary account of the complex activities which comprise the reading process. There are many different academic approaches to the study of fiction reading. Philosophers and linguists, educators, psychologists, literary scholars and theorists, all contribute different perspectives on the cognitive, emotional, cultural, and social forces which drive a reader's imaginative engagement with words on a page.

In describing the readers' encounters with *Wolf*, the study explores details of the temporal processes which occur as insights into the workings of the text are accumulated and assessed. Readers necessarily begin with almost no understanding of the story or the way it is told; they must acquire information both about the story and about the best strategies for proceeding further at the same time. They must find a workable balance between the need for momentum and the need for accountability to the text. This balance is often achieved by a series of compromises, which are described in this dissertation as the achievement of a "good enough"

reading. Readers may show a preference for greater momentum or greater accountability; they may also appear to be more engaged by different aspects of the text. Furthermore, some readers display an affective response to the characters and the plot; others manifest greater interest in compositional aspects of the text.

By investigating specific responses to a single, complex text produced by particular, individual readers, this project generated insights which may be applied to more general descriptions of reading.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many, many people have been very generous with time and advice over the course of this project, and I would like to thank them formally.

The first and most obvious obligation is to the ten teenaged readers who provided the bulk of the data in this study. I understand the reasons for the rules of anonymity but their main drawback is that I can never say a public thank you to these ten students. Their interest, intelligence and cooperation, and their general friendliness and courtesy made this project a pleasure to do.

I would also like to thank the teachers, principals and school secretaries of these students, who made every effort to accommodate me in terms of both time and a quiet place for taping. Their students are a credit to the work they do every day, and the way they exerted themselves to help an outside researcher is a credit to their interest in increasing our understanding of the work involved in teaching.

Similarly, I am greatly obliged to the university undergraduates and their instructor and to the Ph.D. student who participated in the pilot study. Again, their thoughtful and helpful contributions confirmed my suspicion that every reader is an interesting reader. Two people were especially helpful in setting up the pilot study, at a time when support was particularly valuable because my own ideas were more nebulous. I would like to thank Karen Day and Joyce Edwards. I am also obliged to Karen for introducing me to the work of Christopher Collins.

In the course of this work, I must have discussed the novel, *Wolf*, with almost a hundred people at different times and in different circumstances. I would like to thank those members of the University of Alberta graduate adolescent literature class, LIS 515, who welcomed me into their class discussions on this book for three years running. I am also grateful to the members of the library school reading group for adolescent literature who discussed this book some years ago, and whose support and friendship at a more general level has been invaluable.

Another reading group which has contributed to my understanding of reading (though they are in no way responsible for any of my interpretations) is the group which runs from the Department of Psychology and looks at more clinical approaches to reading. I thank them for their welcome to a complete stranger and also for the ways in which they have challenged some of my thinking; I hope I have occasionally reciprocated.

Although I technically started on my doctoral work in 1991, the roots of this work go back many years before that. I owe a great deal to the British organization, the National Association for the Teaching of English and particularly to their London branch. Their weekend workshops through the 1980s were models of in-service education and teacher development. NATE and LATE are committed to the idea that teachers learn and are refreshed by considerations of theory as well as tips for practice; this dissertation is just one small fruit of that policy.

I am deeply indebted to my British friends, Jenifer and Richard Allaway, both for their newspaper clipping service which would put a professional organization to shame, and also (and more importantly) for their constant interest and support. I would also like to thank Geoff Fox of the University of Exeter for his high level of encouragement over the years of this project.

There are, of course, many Canadian friends and colleagues whose support has also been unwavering. I would particularly like to thank Dennis Sumara, Rebecca Luce-Kapler, Jill McClay and John Oster who have read and commented on parts of this work in progress. At a more general level, I am grateful to all my friends and colleagues in the Department of Secondary Education and in the School of Library and Information Studies who have shown an interest in my work and provided opportunities for me to discuss it with others in the field. The office staff in both departments have exerted themselves to be helpful on all occasions, and I would like to thank them all. Beyond my two "home" departments, both Myer Horowitz and Stephen Arnold have been highly supportive of my work at all times.

All families of doctoral students have a great deal to put up with, but my family has gone far beyond the level of helpful tolerance. My daughters, Beth and Sarah, have both read *Wolf* and talked to me about it; they and my husband, Terry, have taken a constructive interest in the project from the outset. I know I cannot thank them adequately for their encouragement and support, both practical and emotional; I could not have done this work without it.

Finally, there are three women whose part in this project has been crucial.

Other graduate students have often remarked to me that the most enviable aspect of my life as a student is that I have not had to work alone. At every step of the way, my friend and classmate, Ingrid Johnston, has contributed ideas, looked at rough drafts (often on a daily basis), suggested ways around bottlenecks, and made me the gift of her own fine abilities as a critical reader. She has also, perhaps most valuably of all, simply listened, at length and in detail; her constructive and bracing sympathy has been a major factor in my enjoyment of the whole process of this project.

I have been very fortunate with my supervisors as well. Over the course of this project, I have worked with two of them. I would like to thank my main supervisor, Margaret Iveson, who has been actively helpful since before I transferred to the Department of Secondary Education. She has made room for my idiosyncratic needs and preferences; she has offered support and kept a steady stream of books and papers coming my way; she has smoothed my way into the school system and out again; she has provided opportunities for me to increase my exposure to adolescent literature and my contribution to the profession. She has been a careful and constructive reader of the work as it developed and her support has been unwavering.

While Marg was on sabbatical for a year, I worked under the supervision of Anna Altmann, who had previously advised me on my master's thesis. With Anna, I established the theoretical base which supports all the other work in this dissertation. Over the course of two very demanding independent studies, we thrashed out many of the contradictions involved in different descriptions of reading. Her interest and excitement over the project were genuine but she never allowed my enthusiasm for an idea to cloud her judgement; and that kind of detached engagement was vital to my developing understanding of (at least some of) the complexity of reading. Even a simple measure of the hours she donated to this work would be substantial; multiplied by the value-added contribution of her intelligent interest, it becomes overwhelming. I thank her for all of it.

It should go without saying that all those mentioned above should take credit for their positive contributions to this work; mistakes and misunderstandings are my responsibility alone.

I am obligated to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their financial support of this project and of the work which I am about to commence.

A final word of gratitude must go to the person who in a very real way, made all this work possible: Gillian Cross, the author of *Wolf*. It is surely a tribute to the power of that book that, after two and a half years of steady work with the text, I could re-read it just before I defended this dissertation and find it still fresh and exciting. I have never had any form of contact with her, but I hope she would be heartened by the different ways in which so many readers engaged with her story.

At a different level of acknowledgement, Appendix A contains the first 34 pages of *Wolf* by Gillian Cross, published by Oxford University Press in 1990 and Puffin Books in 1992. These pages appear by permission of Oxford University Press.

January 1995

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"NEITHER A MIRROR NOR A WINDOW": INTRODUCTION

Most people know what reading is. The reader regards the text, decodes the symbols, interprets the material and makes some kind of sense out of the whole unit of writing. But there are a number of factors which make describing reading at any more precise level a very demanding operation indeed.

Reading is first of all invisible. Any report of another's reading must rely on some kind of reproduction of the actual experience; there is no way to tap into the experience itself. Secondly, reading takes place over time and, until it is over, it is partial. A reader only grasps the whole when the reading is finished--if then. Up to that point, the reader is dealing with partial data, exploring, predicting, extrapolating, coordinating. Any report on a reading in progress must allow for confusion, misunderstanding, forgetting and false prediction.

"Read" is a transitive verb. Although the phrase, "I'm reading," would commonly be regarded as grammatical English, in fact, it is impossible to read without reading *something*. The text affects the reader's behaviour and reactions and must be taken into account in any study of a reader's actions and thoughts.

Like other human activities, reading has a content and a context. The reader exists in a specific situation and culture, reads for a particular purpose. The text has been created by someone (also culturally situated) who presumably has also had some kind of purpose in mind. It may be impossible and unnecessary to establish the author's original purpose, but traces of it appear in the text and affect the reader one way or another.

What happens as we read? Is it possible to describe the experience without destroying it? Can we pin down the cognitive, affective and imaginative details of what we experience? Can we find a way of capturing our own experience and how it feels from the inside? Is it possible to explore the reading of someone else, to make comparisons between different experiences of the same text? If so, how do we make allowances for the fact that we tend to see what we are looking for?

Questions such as these provided the starting point for this project. Some of the answers lie in the study which follows. Unavoidably, these answers are often dense and complex. Reading is a complicated, contradictory, often messy activity. A simple and tidy description of such a process would be so reductive as to be more or less useless. Trying to pin down the necessary complexity, however, feels rather like trying to stuff clouds into pillowcases.

At least we can start by putting some labels on the pillowcases. The emphasis in this project will be on reading as performative, and the performance of reading involves two different levels of activity. I will talk about the imaginative force which propels the development of what readers *experience* as they read a piece of fiction; I will also talk about the technical processes of what readers actually *do* when they confront a page of print. The two kinds of activity feed each other, and both forms of engagement with the print are actually governed (though not to the point of complete control) by the words on the page.

There can be few things in life more deceptive than a page of print. Black and white, fixed and stable, it mocks a reader with its definitiveness. Yet, as we all know, the process of reading which begins with that page of print is, by its very nature, incomplete, tentative, and shifting.

Furthermore, the process of writing which led up to the creation of that page of print is also one of recursiveness, of frustration, of grasping at the unsayable. Although the text looks so final and conclusive, the process which created it is also tentative, always seeking to improve. So the page lies (in more than one sense of that word perhaps) as the apparently fixed interface between two sets of processes which are temporal, inconclusive, and aiming to be good enough for the moment.

Any description of reading should also take account of the text being read. And yet, a consideration of what happens during a reading cannot be confined to an inspection, however careful and thoughtful, of the text alone. The text is not a train-track along which the reader travels in complete obedience with no deviation possible. Neither, of course, is it an open, virgin field where one roams completely at random. The text both enables and constrains possible readings; a successful relationship between reader and words is a vigorous one.

Andrew Stibbs has given us a metaphor so extravagant that it almost qualifies as a conceit, but I find it a helpful way to describe the kinds of issues I am talking about here.

> Popular metaphors of engaged private reading say readers are "immersed" in the "world" of text. Whereas good advice to immersed non-swimmers is to relax, competent swimmers can have a lot more fun by thrashing about. They can pop out of the water, sometimes, to remind themselves that the water is not--as fish believe--the only world. Competent readers are amphibious: they can enjoy both the air and the water; they know the difference; from the atmosphere they can enjoy the view of the textual pond, and when they're in the pond they can recognise its surface as neither a mirror nor a window but an interface to be played with. What is good for you is not always a pleasure but amphibians need not be cold-blooded. Criticism is a pleasure in itself and children's enjoyment of comics and other ostentatiously unnaturalistic texts proves that pleasure is possible without entire suspension of disbelief. Meanwhile, for teachers, a rationale for teaching literature as texts for frogs--not documentaries for tadpoles--provides them with a defence against Mrs. Grundy. (1993, 58)

To continue this metaphor, the *sine qua non* of an amphibian life, the essential first step of what qualifies as "good enough" swimming, is the ability to float. Until readers learn how to imagine with words, they have missed the necessary preliminary requirement of reading fiction.

Floating, swimming, thrashing, playing; these are verbs of action. Similarly, reading is an action verb, and to describe it as static is to miss the performative thrust of the word. A general description of reading in these lively terms can easily be accomplished; but two other elements have to be taken into account which make analysis more difficult. One is the private and inarticulate nature of simple silent reading; the other is its irreducible specificity and individuality. Reading is singular. One person reads one text for the first time only once; for the second time, only once, and so on. To a degree, any description of reading must be an aggregation of these singularities. Generalizations are possible, but we must always add a proviso that we do not ever read "generally." We read specifically.

Reading is singular, but this dissertation is going to talk in abstract terms as well as particular ones. Reading can be a contradictory and paradoxical process but I will nevertheless often discuss it in relatively straightforward terms.

My idea, when I started this project, was to render visible as many different aspects of reading as possible. I wanted to provide an occasion for the exploration of what readers may experience and do while engaging with a particular text. To this end, I made my research question very open-ended, with a bias towards methodology rather than towards any particular kind of finding. I also explored studies of reading from many different disciplines, hoping to provide myself with a set of analytical lenses which would be flexible and sensitive, and which would expand rather than foreclose on my inspection of what the readings produced.

The research question

Readers explore fictional texts in ways which are learned and conventional and simultaneously in ways which are personal and idiosyncratic. A text enables and constrains readings in ways which are also both conventional and individual. What can we learn about how people read through an exploration of a single, rich, literary text combined with an investigation of the readings of specific adolescents meeting that text for the first and the second time?

Another way of expressing this question is perhaps simpler: What can we find out about reading if we give readers a novel and monitor their attempts to make sense of it?

The text

To explore this question, I chose a complex young adult novel, *Wolf*, by Gillian Cross. *Wolf* tells the story of Cassy, a 14-year-old London girl, who lives with her grandmother but is sent, at unpredictable intervals, to stay with her flighty mother, Goldie. One such visit is the subject of this book, and, at a surface level, the book is a suspenseful thriller. Unknowingly, Cassy sets in motion a series of dangerous and frightening events.

It is possible to read this book at the level of plot alone. However, interwoven with the action is a series of fragments from other texts: fairy tales, myths and legends, snippets of natural history, etymology. A reader may become aware of these other layers at many different points in the book, so, for the purposes of studying response, it offers useful potential for the observation of readers as they perceive the need to change reading gears, as it were.

The methodology

No study of silent reading can be accomplished without some form of interference in the very activity it attempts to describe, so the procedure I developed for recording reactions necessarily involved a certain amount of damage limitation. Recording response to the complete novel would result in utterly unwieldy data; ignoring parts of the novel would falsify the experience. A compromise was necessary. I asked readers, whom I saw individually, to read with me the first 34 pages of the book, the first four chapters. They read each chapter silently, and before proceeding to the next chapter, provided a retrospective account of what they had noticed in that chapter. The metaphor I used with them was one of the action replay, the re-running of the film of an event so that it can be observed again. An action replay of this kind, where participants re-create their sensations, observations, and questions, is not the same as the real thing, but it was the least intrusive form of recording that I could devise. In effect, the readers provided a retrospective version of a think-aloud protocol for each chapter before advancing. These accounts were taped and transcribed.

After this work was completed, each reader took the book home and finished reading it in more natural surroundings, with the ordinary number of domestic interruptions. When they had read to the end, they came back for a second session with me. We proceeded in exactly the same way. They read each of the first four chapters silently and recorded a retrospective account of what had particularly struck them. This time, of course, they knew where the book was going. I hoped to gain at least oblique access to their private reading at home by their accounts of a re-reading. I was also interested in any differences between a first or naive reading of the text and a later, more sophisticated reading which could make use of a reader's understanding of how the text worked overall.

After this recording was complete, we continued the second session with a general discussion between the individual reader and me, first on the topic of *Wolf* as a whole and then on a brief description of their specific history as readers. Again, this was all taped and transcribed.

I opted for the retrospective rather than the simultaneous think-aloud protocol in the interest of minimizing the interference with the mental project of reading. Judith Langer (1989) produced a substantial study of reading and writing activities in which she divided her subjects into two groups: one reported as they read or wrote and the other reported retrospectively. She recorded minimal differences according to mode. (178) This finding encouraged me to take the less disruptive route of commenting at the end of each chapter.

Ten adolescent readers completed this project: five were from Grade 8 (aged 13 - 14) and five were from Grade 11 (aged 16 - 17). I wanted to sample the responses of readers of different ages to see if I could observe anything of the dynamics of development. The number is far too small to be useful for generalization, and I did not worry unduly over any kind of random selection. The readers came from two junior high schools and two senior high schools in Edmonton, Alberta. I asked the English language arts teachers who agreed to cooperate to select readers for me. I did not give them any extensive selection criteria, but I did say that I was not necessarily interested in meeting only their strongest readers. I also specified that I would like a mix of girls and boys and that I would prefer readers who would be likely to finish the book.

In the end, I talked to two boys and three girls at each level. As will be clear from the accounts of the readings which make up Part III of this dissertation, their reading abilities and histories were variable. I did not attempt to track down their school records and I did not inquire into their social backgrounds, although some details were inevitably revealed in the course of talking about reading histories. In the absence of a genuinely random sample and in the light of my own sharp awareness of my amateur status as any kind of sociologist, I decided to concentrate on the individual encounter between person and book. I regarded any attempt to classify these readers psychologically, ethnically, economically or scholastically as beyond my competence and consequently impertinent and not very useful. The readers were not all white, nor were they monolithically first-language English speakers; but I did not make any systematic inquiries about their backgrounds beyond what they chose to tell me about their reading histories. As will become clear, they all had a background of reading Western texts, and only one spoke of living for any time outside Canada. They all approached the text with confidence, and, to the extent that they all made at least some perceptive and intelligent comments on the story, that confidence was not misplaced. Without exception, they all provided a great deal of fascinating data, which offered illumination on both facets of reading: what they did and what they experienced.

The results

The detailed results of this work follow later in the dissertation. Very briefly, I want to say here that this methodology allowed some very rich and complex data to emerge. Although I did not expect to be successful in capturing the whole range of possible responses to text, I was delighted with the scope, the variety and the detail of the material which the readers provided.

It is no good, of course, to have "thick" data which is viewed through a simplistic and reductive template. Earlier, I paraphrased my official research question into a simpler version: What can we find out about reading if we give readers a novel and monitor their attempts to make sense of it? This question remains simple only if we ignore the prime importance which attaches to the word "monitor." Another part of this whole project, which is more or less invisible in the research question as it is worded, is the development of a set of descriptions of reading which would allow for a sensitive investigation of the performative powers of readers. An account of this trawl through theories and research reports, and my own subsequent development of a synthesis of other opinions, must obviously form an important part of this dissertation.

The organization of the dissertation

The natural tendency of any complex description of reading is to sprawl. I found this to be true at every level of this work. The research work into other people's thinking became broader and more complicated every time I thought about it. The data produced by the readers refused to reduce into tidy little two-page summaries.

My own readings of *Wolf* multiplied and became deeper and subtler. All this development was exciting and challenging as it occurred. The real problems developed when I tried to organize the material into something that another reader could assimilate and benefit from.

In my original conception of this study, I had projected an elegant and simple outline of the overall shape and scope, long before I began any of the detailed work. For some time, I sustained the illusion that I could control my ever-expanding mass of material. But I felt, and I still feel, that to streamline the contradictions and to put restrictions on the cross-fertilising powers of different disciplines would be reductive and therefore deceptive. What wound up being sacrificed instead was my elegant overall shaping strategy. This dissertation is often unavoidably dense. At times it feels unwieldy and overwhelming. My solution to this problem is only a partial one; I have provided as many signposts as I can.

The pages which follow are organized as follows:

Part I

This section discusses what we know already about the performative aspects of reading. It involves a synthesis of findings from research into reading processes, studies of beginning readers, related ideas from different literary theories, and insights from other disciplines such as linguistics and philosophy. In the process of synthesizing this material, I developed theories and hypotheses of my own, so the opening section of this dissertation is more than a straightforward literature survey.

Part II

This section explores the specific and particular text which formed the heart of this research project. It looks at *Wolf* from a variety of perspectives, exploring the book at the level of story, of intertextual reference, and of language.

Part III

This part of the dissertation provides the accounts of the readers' engagement with the text of *Wolf*, along with an analysis of what we may learn about reading from their encounters with the book. In an attempt to make manageable the ineluctable singularity of the different readings, the students are grouped in four sections. Four Grade 8 readers form one group which provides the basis for a discussion of the idea of "good enough" reading. Three readers, one from Grade 8 and two from Grade 11 form the second group, which offers data to support a discussion of emotionally engaged reading. Two Grade 11 readers form the next group which involves an analysis of intellectually engaged reading. The fourth section involves just one Grade 11 reader who supplies an example of a reading which invokes all the previous headings.

This collection of narrative accounts of the ten individual readers is followed by an investigation of specific points of the text and an analysis of how readers' reactions to particular words and phrases matched or diverged. It provides a more text-based counterpoint to the reader-based descriptions. Again, examples and analysis are intermingled.

Part IV

This final section involves an attempt to sum up the findings of this study and to develop our understanding of reading as performance.

Short cuts

It is not absolutely essential to read the dense theoretical material in Part I in order to understand the rest of the dissertation (which is somewhat livelier to read). A reader who wanted to get a quick overview before proceeding to Parts II, III and IV, could achieve this end by reading Chapter 1 and the two sections of "Key Terms" which introduce Chapters 2 and 3. Similarly, a reader in an even greater hurry could make do with the plot summary of *Wolf* near the beginning of Chapter 4 instead of reading the entire analysis.

Appendix 1 contains the first four chapters of *Wolf* itself, on which all the transcripts are based. It would be possible to make sense of the dissertation by reading just these four chapters, but it would certainly be more useful (and more interesting) to read the entire book which is 140 pages long. At a minimum, reading the first 34 pages of the book is an essential prerequisite to making any sense of Part III.

Part I

READING: WHAT WE KNOW

Chapter 1

"ALL AIR AND THOUGHT": THE COMPLEX INGREDIENTS OF FICTION READING

Describing the full complexity of what we do when we read a story is just about impossible. We pick up a story with a set of expectations about fiction in general and, usually, about this text in particular; these expectations suggest the first top-down strategies. Simultaneously, we process the print on the page, making some kind of meaning out of the individual words and sentences: the bottom-up route. The interplay of what we bring and what the text brings is so intricate that it almost defies pinning down.

Two examples of description illustrate the range of the problem of definition. Late in 1993, a team of researchers at the Human Communications Research Centre in Glasgow claimed a new precision in our understanding of how reading works.

> Far from skimming over the text, as some researchers have suggested, the Glasgow team discovered that readers always fix on each word and the first three or four letters of the next--a "text window".
>
> No matter how skilled the reader or predictable the text, this "window" remains at around 18 characters. (Young, 1993, 1)

At the other extreme of the continuum, consider Victor Nell's lyrical description of what happens when we read:

> Reading for pleasure is an extraordinary activity. The black squiggles on the white page are still as the grave, colorless as the moonlit desert; but they give the skilled reader a pleasure as acute as the touch of a loved body, as rousing, colorful and transfiguring as anything out there in the real world. And yet, the more stirring the book the quieter the reader; pleasure reading breeds a concentration so effortless that the absorbed reader of fiction (transported by the book to some other place, and shielded by it from distractions), who is so often reviled as an escapist and denounced as the victim of a vice as pernicious as tippling in the morning should instead be the envy of every student and every teacher.
>
> These are the paired wonders of reading: the world-creating power of books, and the reader's effortless absorption that allows the book's fragile world, all air and thought, to maintain itself for a while, a bamboo and paper house among earthquakes; within it readers acquire peace, become more powerful, feel braver and wiser in the ways of the world. (1988,1)

It seems to me that there is a third wonder to be considered: how the inspection of eighteen characters at a time leads to this entranced "movement" within another world, while the body of the reader actually remains fixed in the chair. How do we move from the recognition of letters and words into the enrichment of a virtual experience? What cognitive, affective and social processes enable us to make this transition?

My exploration of the phenomenon of reading will also work on a top-down, bottom-up basis, attempting to take account both of what readers *experience* and what readers *do*. The technical processing supports the imaginative construction; the imagination feeds the process of grasping the sense of the words on the page. I will try to look at both aspects of reading as well as considering how they interact.

Michael Cole and Yrjö Engeström consider one aspect of our ability to orchestrate data from the bottom up and organizational ideas from the top down:

> In principle, theories of reading posit the existence of both "bottom-up" decoding processes that assemble larger and larger units of text and "top-down," comprehension-driven processes that constrain the bottom-up processes to permit interpretation of the decoded texts.
>
> When cognitive scientists present such models, the "bottom-up" parts of the process tend to be well specified up to the level of a word and, perhaps, to the level of a sentence or even a paragraph. But the "ultimate" top-down constraint appears only as an arrow descending from the top of the diagram, descending, as it were, from the bow of Zeus. . . . Implicitly, this sort of model assumes reading to be a solitary activity occurring inside the head of the learner; the fact that learning is part of a larger, joint activity, called instruction, is not acknowledged. In reality, with very few exceptions, acquiring the ability to read is most decidedly *not* an individual process, and we have a pretty good idea of where Zeus's arrow is coming from--the teacher, the bearer of the cultural past, the bearer of authority concerning the correct interpretation of the text, the organizer of the teaching/learning process. (1993, 22 - 23)

I quite agree that learning to read is a socially constituted operation, but I think that in this passage Cole and Engestrom, in their consideration of top-down, have stopped very far short of the top. Indeed the teacher provides motivation and strategies for approaching a text with a view to grasping for its overall meaning. But first, the reader has to have some idea of what this mental activity is for.

Most children are taught to read with fiction, and the very first step in coming to terms with fiction is grasping that it is not-fact, that it has to be imagined, that stories "exist" in a way that objects do not. Small children spend many hours in working through the ramifications of this discovery and it is the strength of this understanding that the teacher later utilises in order to enrol students in the challenge of learning to make sense of the story and of the words that make up the story.

In other words, in the terms of Stibbs' amphibian metaphor, we have to learn to "float" in a story and to use that knowledge to help us to "float" on the words of the text. How do we do that?

The fictive, in life and in print

I will start with the large questions. How do we learn to understand fiction? How do we find our place in relation to an account of things that never happened? What is our definition of success in this endeavour?

The fictive permeates our lives in many ways. As Mary F. Rogers points out, the idea of the fictive is much broader than something to be confined to specific stories.

> Underlying every human world are shared but implicit agreements to act as if some matters are true, obvious, or at least plausible enough not to necessitate questioning. . . . What appears obvious or given rests atop a series of implicit statements, declaring "let's act as if. . . ."[ellipsis in original] The fictive is a deeply but silently social "Let's pretend." A "we" establishes the fictive, thus distinguishing it from the fantastic.
>
> Games and stories readily illustrate the fictive. When people play a frantic game of "tag" or a heated tennis match, they enter a world resting on as-if agreements: Let us act as if whether or not I tag you is fateful; let us act as if "love" is having zero on the scoreboard and hitting balls back and forth across the net is a serious adult activity. . . . In order to occupy themselves with matters at hand in the world of games or any other world people must "forget" the arbitrary agreements underlying that world. Establishing a world means masking its fictive foundations. For all *practical* (but not deconstructive) purposes, worlds consign the fictive to the margins of consciousness.
>
> Unlike inhabitants of other worlds, imaginative writers make the fictive an object of consciousness. (1991, 208)

Readers of stories, then, are dealing with a particular and relatively self-conscious form of "as if."

The comparison to game-playing is a fruitful one in considering how fiction works. Kendall Walton also makes use of this analogy:

> What all representations have in common is a role in *make-believe*. Make-believe, explained in terms of imagination, will constitute the core of my theory. I take seriously the association with children's games--with playing house and school, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, with fantasies built around dolls, teddy bears, and toy trucks. We can learn a lot about novels, paintings, theater, and film by pursuing analogies with make-believe activities like these. (1990, 4)

Similarly, Umberto Eco finds the analogy to games helpful:

> [A]ny walk within fictional worlds has the same function as a child's play. Children play with puppets, toy horses, or kites in order to get acquainted with the physical laws of the universe and with the actions that someday they will really perform. Likewise, to read fiction means to play a game by which we give sense to the immensity of things that happened, are happening, or will happen in the actual world. By reading narrative, we escape the anxiety that attacks us when we try to say something true about the world.
>
> This is the consoling function of narrative--the reason people tell stories, and have told stories from the beginning of time. And it has always been the paramount function of myth: to find a shape, a form, in the turmoil of human experience. (1994, 87)

Stories operate on a different plane from our everyday dealings with the world; they exist in the bounded world of representations. Ellen Winner looks at how young children master the workings of story.

> Of these components of a story that the storyteller must eventually master, two must be tackled at the outset. Perhaps most basic is the construction of a boundary between the fictional world of the story and the everyday world of reality. Storytellers must narrate the story, but they must not enter into the story action directly. Thus, the child who tells the giraffe story must realize that he cannot step into the story frame and interact directly with the giraffe or the bird. These story characters must be seen to exist in a separate, bounded, fantasy world, one that is independent of the real world. Failure to respect the boundary between story and reality results in a failure to construct an autonomous fictional world. (1982, 318)

Winner convincingly describes the development of this understanding. She describes studies by Scarlett and Wolf where very small children were presented with an incomplete story and asked to finish it off. The developmental patterns are clear.

> One of the stories opened as a little girl left her house and went for a walk in the woods. As the story was narrated, the experimenter enacted the events, using toy replicas of a little girl, a house, and trees. The little girl spent the afternoon in the forest, picking flowers and talking to the animals. Suddenly she realized that it was growing dark, and she did not know how to find her way home. Here the storyteller stopped and asked the child to take over.
>
> Children of different ages responded to this task in characteristic ways. Eighteen-month-olds simply picked up the toy replicas and explored them. Any sense that there was a story to complete escaped them. Two- and three-year-olds realized there was a story to be finished. They also understood that the story was to be finished by getting the little girl back home. However, this goal was achieved in a rather non-narrative fashion: the toy girl was simply picked up by the children and deposited back home. "Now she's home," they typically announced.
>
> These children had entered into the story world and rescued the main character. Because the children performed the rescue directly, rather than working through the story character, they revealed that they had not yet constructed a boundary that sets off the story world and which cannot be crossed. Examples of such direct intervention abound. . . .
>
> Between the ages of three and five, children began to create more autonomous fictional worlds. By five, the story problem was solved within the story itself. Children no longer stepped in and performed the action directly. However, while the problem was solved within the story world, the solution was still very primitive. For example, instead of stepping in and depositing the lost girl back home, children of this age simply made one of the other characters do this. (1982, 320 - 321)

The bounded and separate nature of story is clearly very important, and something that young children often experiment with. Shelby Anne Wolf and Shirley Brice Heath describe Lindsey, whose response to stories in her pre-school years was to re-enact them, moving intensely across the boundary *into* the story world, making props out of all kinds of domestic accoutrements and recruiting parents and little sister as actors.

> It was a continuing cycle. We would borrow books from the library to read. Lindsey would request over and over again those that she liked, and we were eager to read her desired choice. As she became more familiar with a text, she would choose elements to stage, complete with props and actors. We would play parts according to her instructions and help her assemble props. . . . In our early storybook productions, the entire family played according to Lindsey's general instructions, taking up the roles she assigned, interpreting a prop in the same imaginative light, but making extensions of her choices along the way. If we departed too far from Lindsey's vision, she quickly brought us back. (1992, 41)

Lindsey's preference for enacting stories is specific to her; her younger sister, Ashley, for example, preferred a more verbal response. However, she serves as a useful illustration of how small children have to come to terms with the understanding that stories exist within their own worlds. Lindsey appears to be quite clear that she is crossing over that boundary when she plays: she requires dressing-up and props and she insists that the other actors keep within the limits of the story world.

Respecting the boundaries of the story world is one of the two initial requirements of coming to terms with story described by Winner. The second essential element is an understanding of how narrative actually works:

> Next in importance, the narrator must construct a plot that abides by elementary narrative rules. According to theoretical accounts of narrative, the plot must have a clear beginning, middle, and end, and it must be structured around a problem that the main character confronts and eventually resolves in some way. (1982, 318 - 319)

It seems to me that it is at this point that we begin to move into the dynamics between top-down and bottom-up understandings. The general understanding that a story is operating on a plane of fictionality overlaps with the necessity of creating it out of particular words or images in a particular order. Children learn about imagining, but not in the abstract; in the case of stories, they learn about imagining with words and they learn about it with a specific set of words at any given time.

Arthur Applebee supplies extended examples of children exploring the limits of fictiveness in the context of specific stories. The children he describes are intrigued by the limits of reasonableness and also highly respectful of the need to preserve the exact words of a story. Throughout childhood, according to Applebee's study, children gradually become aware of the fictional nature of stories such as fairy tales. Even very young children, who may still be convinced that stories simply tell true accounts of other times and other places, do learn to be aware of conventions.

> [F]rom a very early age these discussions begin to be subsumed within the conventional, culturally provided frame of the story mode; even the two-year-olds studied used at least some of the conventions studied in 70 percent of their stories. By five, they had begun to absorb common story characters into the stories they told, and by six, to explain their expectations about witches and fairies, lions and wolves. (1978, 52)

Mieke Bal, in her introduction to narratology, talks about a three-layer distinction between text, story and fabula. A fabula is "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors." (5) A story is "a fabula that is presented in a certain manner." (5) A text is a particular set of words, written or spoken.

> The only material which we have for our investigation is the text before us. And even this statement is not correctly put; the readers have only the book, paper and ink, and they must use this material to establish the structure of the text. . . . Only the text layer, embodied in the sign system of language is directly accessible. (1985, 6)

Only the text layer is directly accessible, yet Lindsey, enacting her stories, is clearly working with the material of fabula, making her own story out of the matrix supplied by the words of the texts which were read to her. The sophistication of the intellectual work of small children should not be underestimated.

Words and story

Allowing for the importance of the specific set of words in the creation of the larger understandings introduces further complexity. The actual arrangement of words on the page has ramifications beyond the explication of a plot. This is how Susanne Langer has described the verbal complications:

> Everything actual must be transformed by imagination into something purely experiential; that is the principle of poesis. The normal means of making the poetic transformation is language; the way an event is reported gives it the appearance of being something casual or something momentous, trivial or great, good or bad, even familiar or new. A statement is always a formulation of an idea, and every known fact or hypothesis or fancy takes its emotional value largely from the way it is presented and entertained.
>
> The power of words is really astounding. Their very sound can influence one's feelings about what they are known to mean. The relation between the length of rhythmic phrases and the length of chains of thought makes thinking easy or difficult, and may make the ideas involved seem more or less profound. The vocal stresses that rhythmicize some languages, the length of vowels in others, or the tonal pitch at which words are spoken in Chinese and some less known tongues, may make one way of wording a proposition seem gayer or sadder than another. (1953, 258)

We have particular ways of using words to tell stories. There is a term, *story grammar*, which refers specifically to the generic shapes of stories. There is also, however, a specific linguistic grammar of telling stories, a grammar of *as if*. Most particularly, this involves the subjunctive mode, and a number of writers have invoked the subjunctive to explain how words make stories work. Jerome Bruner has perhaps expressed it most simply. He says, "Narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intention." (1986, 16) Narrative works, he points out, by "*subjunctivizing reality*." He goes on to elaborate: "To be in the subjunctive mode, is, then, to be trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties." (1986, 26)

The difference between real life and fiction, says Susanne Langer, is that while real life is mixed up with various "extraneous elements, assumptions and speculations, that present life as a chain of events rather than as a single progressive action," (1953, 265) fiction, being composed of nothing but virtual memory presents an illusion of life which she calls experiential.

> The poetically created world is not limited to the impressions of one individual, but it is limited to impressions. All its connections are *lived* connections, i.e. motivations, all causes and effects operate only as the motives for expectation, fulfillment, frustration, surprise. (1953, 265)

There is another kind of limitation on the use of words to create fictions, one described by Christopher Collins in his account of the psychology of the literary imagination. He would quarrel with Langer's use of the word "experiential." There is a specific difference, he argues, between our memories, which *are* experiential, and our stories which are mediated through convention. For a narrative to be communicable, it must of necessity not be restricted to a private frame of reference. Our experiences may be recalled accurately or otherwise, but they are recalled richly; we can call up a dense background of what we noticed peripherally during the experience. In fiction, mediated by words which operate by shared convention, this rich, dense background is missing.

Collins says,

> To put it bluntly, when we enter the imaginary space of a text, we don't know where we are. We orient ourselves only in reference to the few landmarks we are given--nouns situated in a void. These nouns are fashioned into an assumed visuospatial network by prepositions, verbs, and adverbs, but are displayed to us only in the linear, unidirectional sequence of word order. Not having actually perceived this scene ourselves, we have no peripheral field in which to detect and target an object as our next image. The fact the speaker may be narrating events from experiential memory does not help one bit to orient us, because this is his, not our, experience; we can imitate the procedural format of retrospection, but we can never supplement another's retrospection by drawing on the contents of that person's memory. (1991, 151)

Collins reiterates this point even more clearly:

> Any transfer of information from one mind to another, Saussure's *circuit de la parole*, constitutes a transfer of data from the experiential or conventional memory system of an addresser to the conventional, *and only the conventional*, system of an addressee. (1991, 151)

Langer calls them lived connections; Collins stresses that in a very profound way they are conventional connections. Yet, as readers know, such connections can become the reader's own, at least temporarily. An awareness of the boundary between the fiction and the real world is important, but an equally important point about experiencing fiction is that the reader appears, mentally and emotionally, to step across this boundary. Lindsey, even as director (and clearly the one in charge) of her enactments of stories, respected the limits of the story; to re-experience it, she moved bodily and imaginatively inside the world of the story, recreating the bounded potential of the subjunctive.

Stories may also spill back over into our lives. In the grip of the spell of the book, readers experience terrors, sorrows and delights which may be beyond their own personal knowledge. Their own physical world may indeed seem to be the more unreal one. I vividly remember calling a child to supper, not realising that she had just reached the scene where the baby dies in Sarah Ellis's novel, *The Baby Project*. This child sat at the table (under protest) and duly swallowed and digested the meal, but it was clear that none of the food in her mouth made any real impact on the workings of her mind at that point.

How does the fictive take over our minds in such a way that it may even linger past the point when the book is put down? Wolfgang Iser describes the fictive as "an operational mode of consciousness" (1993, xiv) and says,

> The act of fictionalizing is therefore not identical to the imaginary with its protean potential. For the fictionalizing act is a guided act. It aims at something that in turn endows the imaginary with an articulate gestalt--a gestalt that differs from the fantasies, projections, daydreams, and other reveries that ordinarily give the imaginary expression in our day-to-day experience. Here, too, we have an overstepping of limits as we pass from the diffuse to the precise. Just as the fictionalizing act outstrips the determinacy of the real, so it provides the imaginary with the determinacy that it would not otherwise possess. In so doing, it enables the imaginary to take on an essential quality of the real, for determinacy is a minimal definition of reality. This is not, of course, to say that the imaginary *is* real, although it certainly assumes an appearance of reality in the way it intrudes into and acts upon the given world. (1993, 3)

Fictional worlds

Thomas Pavel, in his consideration of fictional worlds, also notes the way in which the boundaries between the fictional and the actual may sometimes blur.

> The mobility and poor determinacy of fictional frontiers is often part of a larger pattern of interaction between the domain of fiction and the actual world. Fictional domains can acquire a certain independence, subsist outside the limits of actuality, and sometimes strongly influence us, not unlike a colony established overseas that develops its own unusual constitution and later comes to affect in various ways the life of the metropolis. (1986, 84)

Pavel cites Kendall Walton on how we move in and out of fictions.

> We, too, visit fictional lands, inhabit them for a while, intermingle with the heroes. We are moved by the fate of fictional characters, since, as Kendall Walton argues, when caught up in a story, we participate in fictional happenings by projecting a fictional ego who attends the imaginary events as a kind of nonvoting member. This explanation would account for the plasticity of our relations to fiction; we are moved by the most unlikely situations and characters--Greek kings, Oriental dictators, stubborn maidens, demented musicians, men without qualities. We sent our fictional egos as scouts into the territory to report back; *they* are moved, not us, . . . we only

> lend our bodies and emotions for a while to these fictional egos. . . . [F]ictional, or artistic egos are more apt to feel and express emotions than are dry, hardened actual egos. Schiller's hopes for a betterment of humanity through aesthetic education, were they not based on the presumption that after their return from travel in the realms of art, fictional egos would effectively melt back into the actual egos, sharing with them their fictional growth? (1986, 85)

We have ways of demarcating the boundaries between fictional worlds and non-fictional worlds. There are scholarly arguments over whether fictionality is inscribed in the words of the text or whether it is established by prior understanding between teller and receiver. Ruth Ronen (1994), providing an overview of such debates, suggests that fictionality is decided pragmatically, that is as part of the reciprocating relationship between speakers or between writer and reader. The establishment of the parameters of the fictional world are open for discussion: to take a commonplace example, those tall tales known as urban myths are often preceded by a complex pedigree of veracity (my neighbour's uncle knew a man who . . .). The pretence of truthfulness is actually a conventional part of the fiction. Those fictions which use frame narratives are also playing with the pragmatics of fictionality. Learning how to negotiate such boundaries is part of learning to be both a social person and also a reader.

Ronen makes it clear that fictionality is established relative to the reader.

> [T]he accessibility of fictional worlds to the real world is variable. First, not all parts of the fictional world are equally possible: since all fiction mixes references to historical beings with denotations of the imaginary beings, judgments of accessibility might vary according to the domain in the fictional world whose relative possibility is described. Second, the actual state of affairs is not a stable point of reference: since a reader activates his beliefs and knowledge in deciphering any fictional segment, the distance of fictional worlds from the real world is open to interpretation and is relative to the position of the reader. The reader's relation to the fictional world, although it does not determine accessibility, affects the way fictional truths are described, emphasized, or de-emphasized, considered plausible, anomalous and so on, by the reader. (1994, 94)

Within such a framework, a complete theory of reading would involve an analysis of the interface between the implied reader created by the conditions of the text and the fictional ego of the real reader, submitting to a greater or lesser degree to the demands of the text and making use of his or her own views of the world as a reference base.

Deciding on the boundaries of a particular fictional world, whether they are porous or robust, is part of the challenge facing readers of fiction. There is nothing especially new or post-modern about this issue. In the earliest days of printed book-length fiction, Daniel Defoe played many games with the limits of his fictional universes. David J. Johnson has this to say, for example, about Defoe's 1722 book, *A Journal of the Plague Year.*

> By mingling fact with fiction and treating the fiction as fact, Defoe

> produced a book which had all the appearances of being an authentic account of the Great Plague. Every subsequent writer on the subject borrowed from him--not always with acknowledgment--and his book came to be regarded as an authoritative text. Yet it is as a historical novel rather than as a work of history that it is now remembered. This is not simply because it contains passages of indisputable fiction. . . . A more serious objection lies in the use which he made of his sources. (1966, vii - viii)

The kinds of questions which arose over *A Journal of the Plague Year* or over *Robinson Crusoe* are still highly germane to fiction today. As I write, it is Hallowe'en 1994, and each of my morning papers carries a story about fictional boundaries. The *Edmonton Journal* contains a story about the CBS switchboard being jammed by telephone calls during the telecast of a fictional program about asteroids crashing into Earth ("Viewers 'shocked,' CBS gets the jolt"). Despite the network's frequent insertion of disclaimers, viewers were demanding to know how seriously they should be treating the program which contained simulated news programs and stock market reports. Meanwhile, the *Globe and Mail* carries yet another story about *Forrest Gump* (Lang, A20), a movie in which a fictional character is inserted, by means of computer imaging, into "true" news events of the 1950s and 1960s. Playing with the boundaries between the fictional and what we take for granted as "real" offers many kinds of pleasure and interest.

Engagement, appreciation and criticism

We shift between the real and the imagined world when we read, but another kind of shifting requires some attention as well. When we read a piece of narrative fiction we are coming to terms with a construct, and we often appear to slide back and forth between engagement with that construct and appreciation of the way it was put together. Walton says,

> Appreciation and criticism, participation and observation, are not very separate. One can hardly do either without doing the other, and nearly simultaneously. In order to appreciate a work one must notice what makes it fictional; one must be sensitive to the fictional world. To this extent the appreciator must be a critic. The critic usually cannot get very far in describing the world of a work unless she allows herself to be caught up in the spirit of pretense to some extent, as appreciators are. (1990, 394)

Michael Benton says that combining these two forms of attention is an essential part of reading, although in this case he is talking about reading a poem rather than reading narrative:

> The indwelling value of the poem becomes available to its reader only if the act of reading includes those features that are integral to the nature of the art form. Typically, this requires readers to be alert to sound and rhythm, to hear the tune on the page as a tune within their own consciousness as they read. It is this mental performance of the text that allows access to the poem and to the possibility of dwelling within an imaginative experience: to become an "insider" rather than an "outsider". (1992, 63)

He goes on to make a comparison with the reading of narrative:

> It is harder to achieve this status with poetry than with story. The fact that most poems draw attention to themselves makes it more difficult for readers to become immersed. We may become easily lost in the secondary world of a story; it is harder to get lost in a poem text since its surface features are continually reminding us how it should be read. (1992, 63)

I.A. Richards agrees that critical powers alone are not sufficient to create a genuine commitment to a text.

> In other words, the desire to improve our reading, worthy though it is, won't help us unless it operates through the work of puzzling out a passage because we care what it says. The persistencies of effects--no matter how well we make them overlap--will not systematize themselves into experience (knowledge that returns as power) unless they are heated by an immediate sustaining interest. (1942, 54)

It appears that these commentators would regard a commitment to the world created by the words to be an essential ingredient in any kind of informed reading. This excludes such meaning-deficient reading strategies as "barking at print," the evocative label given to the activity of poor readers who can decode and come to terms with only one word at a time. It also, however, excludes that kind of reading which disentangles the phonics and the syntax without ever involving the reader beyond the cognitive exercise. Benton is talking about reading poetry and fiction, Richards is talking about different varieties of reading, including non-fiction; yet they make strikingly similar points.

The implications of transient experience

A problem with studying the reading of fiction is that, in its unmarked form, it is done for internal rather than external reasons. Once external frameworks and outside rationales are imposed on reading, it changes its nature. This causes concerns for those who are trying to investigate someone else's experience; reading alters as it ceases to be private.

Louise Rosenblatt (1978) made what is probably the most succinct account of the difference between reading for some external purpose and reading for its own sake. She distinguished between "efferent" and "aesthetic" reading. She defines efferent reading in terms of its Latin meaning, to carry away. In efferent reading, the emphasis is on what the reader will take away. In aesthetic reading, however, what is important is the experience of the moment. The reader's attention "is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text." (1978, 25)

Almost any attempt to explore someone else's reading concentrates, by default, on what the reader takes away, for it is what the reader takes away that is available for inspection. Even a reading response journal deals largely with what the reader is prepared to articulate after the actual event of reading.

When I attempted a major exploration of my own reading of a particular text

(*Dangerous Spaces* by Margaret Mahy), I tried to capture my own temporal responses by making very brief notes on "post-it" slips which I attached to the relevant pages as I read. For the most part, I simply jotted down words or phrases from the text and did not attempt to paraphrase or to express my own reactions. The notes themselves, of course, are still highly efferent, but they do help me to reconstruct my more aesthetic reactions as I read.

What surprised me was how fleeting and ephemeral many of my responses were, even within the artificial framework of taking notes as I read. If I had not performed the exercise of writing a subsequent essay on my reactions (Mackey 1993a), my experience of that book would have consisted largely of accumulating an assortment of transient and not particularly memorable emotional reactions. What I did actually "take away" from my first reading--as defined by what I remembered six months later--was a specific memory of two complex images and some vague recollections of certain emotional reactions.

When I sat down to write the essay, of course, I marshalled my memories and referred back to the text many times, so that now I can give a coherent and considered account of the strengths and weaknesses of that book. What interests me here, however, is that my initial, short-term and temporary engagement with the book is the one which more closely resembles ordinary, daily fiction reading--and that even in exploring my own reading, I found it very difficult to gain access to how my experience of the book built up.

With other kinds of reading, there are ways of measuring success. My reading of a recipe is good enough if my cake is fit to eat; my reading of a set of instructions is good enough if my bookcase does not fall down. External outcomes are a check on the success of the reading.

With fiction, nothing is so clear-cut. The first section of this chapter introduced an example of high and specific precision in the counting of characters in a text window. Much of what follows, however, is a testimonial to the imprecision of our reading processes most of the time. This is particularly true in the private experience of reading fiction, where there is little possibility of external monitoring.

Putting limits on complexity

If, as Richards suggests, a reading is not sufficient unless it is "heated" by interest, then its description becomes even more complicated. If its unmarked form involves highly transitory experiences, the operation of catching responses as they evolve is clearly very demanding. We need to find ways of exploring a reader's engagement as it builds up, a very nebulous and amorphous challenge indeed.

The construction of a complete theory which moves from the preliminary details of letter recognition to the furthest reach of the fictional imagination is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I need to mark off the limits of my own explorations. I am working on neither the minute nor the grand scale. The area of discourse practices, processes and conventions, "heated" by some form of engagement with the text, is somewhere in the middle range of our experience of reading. In my examination of one particular text and a number of its readers, that middle range will be the main area of investigation.

Before we turn to this work, however, it may be helpful to explore Michael Benton's list of the paradoxes involved in reading imaginative works. This list may remind us that indeed many things are going on at once as the reader explores the book.

> 1. Reading a story is detached and committed. . . .
> 2. Reading a story entails belief in an acknowledged illusion. . . .
> 3. Reading a story is individual yet cooperative. . . .
> 4. Reading a story is simultaneously monologue and dialogue. . . .
> 5. Reading a story is active and passive. . . .
> 6. Reading a story is recreative and re-creative. . . .
> 7. Reading a story is unique yet repetitive. . . .
> 8. Reading a story entails both abstraction and filling in. . . .
> 9. Reading a story is both ordered and disordered. . . .
> 10. Reading a story is anticipatory yet retrospective. (1992, 15 - 20)

Benton acknowledges that "a collection of paradoxes lacks the solidity of a set of principles," (1992, 21) but argues,

> the creative character of the reading process dictates that it should be conveyed in a manner that befits its plural and contradictory nature.
>
> Finally, even if we lack the neat coherence of a set of principles, there is the phenomenon of the reader's mood enveloping the whole experience and tending to unify the sometimes disparate elements that make up the process. (1992, 21)

Antony Easthope argues for the virtues of paradox in discussing reading, suggesting that every aspect involved cannot be discussed in the same terminology. A reader's material situation can be accounted for, he suggests, and it is possible to make room for discussion of a reader's unconscious desires, but the vocabularies for each are incommensurable.

> Since text and context cannot be thought together within a single coherence, a decentred methodology is unavoidable; that is not a matter for regret but rather something desirable. (1991, 137)

Nevertheless, it will be well worth remembering that even as I dissect the behaviour and the responses of the readers of *Wolf*, even as I make room for decentring paradox, I will be talking about an experience that to the readers, in many important ways, remained unified. A fictional world supplies its own assumption of coherence, and these readers, like many others, expected and supplied an overall understanding of the text.

Chapter 2

"A NETWORK WITH A THOUSAND ENTRANCES": BECOMING A READER

Reading is a complicated activity--in theory because of the complex nature of the mental performance, in practice because of the infinite number of potential combinations between readers and texts. Readers must first come to terms with the idea that words can help us to picture what is not present, what may never have happened. They must establish that there is a method which allows access to the words which enable this imagined experience. And they must accomplish this by extracting concepts and patterns from singular (though often repeated) experiences.

Roland Barthes has argued that any single text embodies literature:

> The commentary on a single text is not a contingent activity, assigned the reassuring alibi of the "concrete": the single text is valid for all the texts of literature, not in that it represents them (abstracts and equalizes them), but in that literature itself is never anything but a single text: the one text is not an (inductive) access to a Model, but entrance into a network with a thousand entrances; to take this entrance is to aim, ultimately, not at a legal structure of norms and departures, a narrative or poetic Law, but at a perspective (of fragments, of voices from other texts, other codes), whose vanishing point is nonetheless ceaselessly pushed back, mysteriously opened: each (single) text is the very theory (and not the mere example) of this vanishing. (1974, 12)

Put in less abstract terms, it is clear that reading necessarily involves a text of some kind, and only one text at any one time. Limiting the investigation of the reading process to the reading of a single text obviously excludes certain aspects and strategies of reading; on the other hand, any reader must use a variety of strategies simply to establish which strategies are actually going to be needed.

Once we begin to deal with a single text, the temptation to concentrate on the text instead of on the reader, becomes very substantial. My emphasis is performative rather than textual, but much of the research and theoretical study has concentrated less on performance and more on text.

There is, however, one substantial area of performative reading research, and that is in the area of beginning reading. For this reason, and because I think we understand reading better if we consider how it is acquired, I am going to explore some of the evidence about what happens as new readers begin to understand what they have to do.

This, as is well known, is a very contentious topic. I do not want to get embroiled in arguments over the fine issues of beginning reading. To avoid this problem, I have adopted two strategies. One is simply to ignore some of the areas of contention and to develop my own synthesis. I am interested in the learning of reading only as it informs mature reading, and I am happy to concede that experience and instruction are both important without working out the appropriate percentages of each for any particular reader. As a second and related strategy, I discuss the early stages of reading in relatively abstract terms. I am not describing a program of action; I am looking to the early stages of reading for insight into what every reader must do.

In the discussion which follows, I have developed terms of my own and borrowed from several disciplines in order to accumulate a useful working vocabulary.

Key terms

Before moving into the complex territory of reading acquisition, it may be useful to acquire a certain familiarity with a rough outline map--in this case, the key terms which will emerge in the early part of the discussion.

Discourse practice is the label given to the instance of a single individual approaching a single text in a particular way. A discourse practice is never entirely repeatable, even if the same individual meets the same text again. A discourse practice is context-bound, affect-laden, socially situated--embedded, in Margaret Donaldson's term. Any single reading is an example of a discourse practice.

Discourse practice, by this reckoning, involves specific activities on a singular occasion, drawing from and feeding into the repertoire of conventions and processes. Content, affect, social and political setting are specific and singular on each occasion, though probably more nebulous than these nouns and adjectives make them sound. Certain aspects of content and affect will remain consistent when one person reads the same text more than once; others will vary with each reading. The text itself does not change, but the context within which it is read means that a discourse practice can never be exactly reproduced.

Before they come to terms with any kind of discourse practice, learners must acquire some understanding and use of **symbolic resources**. Even very small children are aware that we use **representations** to describe aspects of experience by symbolic means. This dense definition actually covers an important step in the understanding of how we come to terms with the world. A representation may be language or pictures, still or moving, or a number system. It may involve a toy or a model; Vygotsky distinguishes between signs and tools but groups them together as elements of mediated activity. (54) Until children understand that we represent the world to each other in many different ways, they will be confined to their own experiential limits.

I do not want to get into philosophical arguments about the relationship between the representation and the world which it represents. Our understanding of the world develops, at least in part, by the ways in which we acquire symbolic resources which we can manipulate mentally. To what extent the physical world corresponds with our representations and to what extent we can successfully communicate these representations to another is a topic so huge that I can only allude to the issue here.

Once children reach the generalized understanding that we can develop mental "stand-ins", which they do at a very early age indeed, their awareness of how particular representational systems work (and play) starts to become more sophisticated. To make their thinking more efficient, children at a very young age start to make use of certain mental strategies, including schemata and scripts.

A schema is a generalised mental structure which establishes a conventional framework for a concept or an understanding, a way of grouping expectations together. There is some debate about whether "structure" is, in fact, the most appropriate word since it implies a certain fixity and a schema may be a more flexible and transient mental phenomenon. People use schemata to provide default values, to "fill in the blanks" where insufficient information is forthcoming. Metonymy is a literary invocation of schemata, when the part suggests the default value of the missing whole.

A **script** is an event schema, a mental outline of the socially appropriate and canonical way to behave in a particular situation. Although an individual does not have to follow a script for an event in any strict way, deviation from the script is usually marked as such. Like other schemata, scripts are built up as the result of an accumulation of experiences; they are flexible and open to change or expansion as experiences change. Very young children make use of scripts but clearly have a smaller repertoire than adults. Scripts, however, can provide them with an understanding of the preliminary forms of behaviour with a text, a guide to rudimentary practices, while they refine their understandings of conventions and processes.

It is an over-simplification, but temporarily a helpful one, to think of schemata as ways of dealing with the nouns of our experiences while scripts help with the verbs. Similarly, for analytical purposes, we may consider the "nouns" and "verbs" of our understanding of reading.

A **discourse convention** is an understanding which helps a reader to process a text. It involves the accumulation of sufficient different experiences to allow for the formulation of a more general rule; it may also be established as the result of more explicit forms of instruction. A discourse convention is abstracted from a number of examples of practice; although conventions are affected by the culture in which they are acquired, they are less context-bound than specific examples of practice. There are numerous examples of discourse conventions, from the relationship between sounds and letters of the alphabet to the "rules" of different genres. A convention need not be understood explicitly in order to function effectively.

A **discourse process** is an action undertaken by the reader in order to cause a text to make sense. Roughly speaking, those aspects of reading collated under the umbrella of *convention* represent the "nouns" of the operation; those aspects of reading which belong under the heading of *process* represent the "verbs." There is often a cross-over but we can be more precise in our descriptions if we make the distinction. An example of a discourse process is the activity of wrap-up in which the reader recognises the boundaries of a sentence, a paragraph, a story section, and mentally assembles the gist of that unit before proceeding. The cross-over occurs, for example, when a reader, in possession of some kind of story schema (a convention if ever there was one) actually slows down at boundary units which are perceived according to expectations set up by the schema. The schema affects the actual manner of reading which in turn reinforces or alters the schema.

From a very early stage indeed, readers not only work out conventions and processes from accumulated practices; they feed these conventions and processes *back into* the reading and their practice is influenced by the schematic equipment they bring to bear. Almost from the very beginning it is a two-way street. Yet, theoretically, it is important to keep in mind the distinction that practice precedes convention-formation. Conventions feed into practice but the conventions themselves are derived from earlier experience, from information received and processed both implicitly and explicitly.

All our encounters with texts, like our encounters with other people, have a **pragmatic** aspect to them, using the specialised meaning of the word which involves the collection of rules, strategies and understandings which govern any encounter between two people. Cultures assemble sets of protocols which organize the parameters of specific interactions between individuals, and pragmatics is the study of such protocols. These continue to operate, under somewhat different guidelines, when the encounter between two people is mediated by a written or printed text rather than an exchange of spoken words.

Deixis or **deictics** is a grammatical term which accounts for one aspect of language that is involved in specifically social ways. Deictics are "shifters," those parts of speech that gain meaning only in context, though their usage is rule-bound. Personal pronouns such as "I" and "you" are deictics; they can be defined only very locally. "I" can be defined as "the person known as Margaret Mackey" only when I use it. Very young children understand the implications of deixis, and it is an important tool in aligning a reader appropriately with a text.

The deictic relationship inside the text is manifested in the development of the **implied reader** and the **implied author**. Neither is a real human being, but rather a construct of the text. The author creates a kind of simulated reader for the text; the reader must likewise develop a construct to represent the writer.

Developing our understanding

My distinction between discourse practices and discourse conventions arises from the work of Marilyn Cooper. I have made use of her terms, although I have made some changes to her definition. This is what she has to say.

> I will begin by considering in some detail a distinction between things one learns as arbitrary rules and things one learns to do by reading and writing in particular situations. I will call the first sort of thing discourse conventions and the second, discourse practices. (1990, 68)

It seems to me that there are many valuable insights to be gained by making a distinction between conventions and practices. However, I want to refine her approach in two ways. First, I want to specify a further distinction between discourse conventions and discourse processes. Readers have an accumulation of conventional understandings about how texts work, but they also have a repertoire of ways to behave with a text, and I believe we can be more precise if we clarify that distinction. Secondly, I want to dispute the clear-cut way in which she describes the acquisition of conventions. We do not simply learn conventions as arbitrary rules, it seems to me. The letter A says /a/, and that is indeed arbitrary, but it is certainly not a hard-and-fast rule as any long-suffering struggler with the phonetic system of the English language will readily affirm. Even in its most abstract and conventional form, the letter A represents a number of vowel sounds, and, when varieties of dialect are added, the concept of "rule" is stretched at least to and possibly beyond its limits. Furthermore, there is the very large range of ways of making the letter A, with upper case versions, at least two printed forms of lower case, and a number, presumably not infinite but very large, of ways of shaping the letter in handwriting, hand printing, and a variety of artistic representations.

Even so simple an idea as learning the letter A highlights the over-simplification of Cooper's approach. The teacher may well devote lessons to "A says /a/," explicitly teaching an arbitrary rule. But to acquire a fully useful and working knowledge of the ramifications of the letter A, pupils must work out patterns for themselves from repeated practices; it would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to acquire a fully functional set of regulations for all possible pronunciations and all possible shapes of the letter A simply by learning a set of rules. *The practices come first.* It seems far more plausible to work from the premise that discourse conventions are sifted out in the mind from a build-up of overlapping experiences and practices. Arbitrary rules will only really make sense when supported by experiences. Certainly we can learn a rule by rote; it may even help us to align ourselves appropriately with a particular experience. But the rule really starts to function when it is perceived as an explicit form of an implicit set of understandings.

Marilyn Jager Adams makes a useful distinction between patterns and rules that are *abstracted* through experience and those that are learned in the *abstract*. Abstracted understandings are developed through the overlap of similar patterns which "provides the means for passive acquisition of abstract, categorical, or 'ruleful' knowledge." (1990, 210)

Rules learned as rules, she says,

> are by definition divorced from the specific, concrete contexts of their application. As such, they must lack the representational underpinnings to be directly absorbed into the associative network.
>
> It is automatic, frequency-based pattern recognition that is responsible for the speed and reliability with which skillful readers process the spellings, sounds, and meanings of words and the spellings and sounds of pseudowords. This facility is the product of the clusters and subclusters of associated units that they have acquired through their experience with print; it is the product of their *abstracted* rules. In contrast, rules that are acquired only as abstract principles must live in another part of the head--the part in charge of conscious interpretation, not the part in charge of automatic, frequency-based responding.
>
> Does that mean that the articulation of spelling-sound rules in reading and writing instruction is a waste of time? No. For purposes of instruction and learning, rules and definitions may be viewed as well-specified labels. As such, they may subserve the same, valuable function as labels, only more directively. . . .
>
> The point is only that rules, definitions, and labels cannot substitute for the perceptual, conceptual, and procedural experiences to which they allude. (1990, 211)

According to Charles Taylor, rules actually exist as practice. The rule can be disembedded and described, but what animates behaviour is something more tacit and more flexible, more open to interactive manoeuvre.

> [R]ules are transformed through practice. The latter is not the simple putting

> into effect of unchangeable formulae. The formula as such only exists in the treatise of the anthropologist. In its operation, the rule exists in the practice it guides. Yet, as we have seen, the practice not only fulfills the rule but gives it concrete shape in particular situations. Practice is, in effect, an ongoing interpretation and reinterpretation of what the rule really means. (1992, 182)

Taylor goes on to emphasise this point even more strongly.

> It is this element of reciprocity that is entirely overlooked by the intellectual theorists. And what it shows is that the rule essentially resides *in* the practice. The rule is what animates the practice at any given moment and not some formulation behind it, inscribed in our thoughts, brains, genes, or whatever. That is why the rule, at any given instant, is what the practice has made it. Yet, if this is so, then it is clearly scientifically disastrous to conceive of the rule as an underlying formula, for in so doing we miss the entire interplay between action under uncertainty and varying degrees of phronetic insight, on the one hand, and the norms and rules that animate this action on the other. The map provides only half the story; to make it decisive is to distort the whole process.
>
> How can there possibly be a rule that exists only in the practices it animates and that does not require, and may not have, any explicit formulation? The answer is: as a result of our embodied understanding. (1992, 183)

Marilyn Jager Adams provides a useful exemplification of how we may derive tacit knowledge from practice, without ever raising it to explicit consciousness:

> If you are still having difficulty with the idea that people can quite thoroughly possess and regularly use knowledge without explicitly knowing that they know it, think about how you might explain to a child why we say "cute little bunny," but not "little cute bunny." Once you have explained that, compare it to "little blue car" versus "blue little car." The point here is not about whether we can explain such linguistic "rules" but that, whether or not we can, we readily use and, therefore, must deeply know them at some level." (1990, 305, n.52)

Focusing on the move from practice to rule-generation does not eliminate the utility of generalisation as a tool in discussing the development of reading potential. For example, Colin Harrison has produced a helpful analysis of the crucial understandings required of a child learning to read. It is interesting to realize that his specific terms can be cross-referenced to the ideas of practices, processes and conventions. One vital element in successful reading, he says, is phonemic awareness which he distinguishes from its more famous relation, phonics, as follows:

> Phonemes are the small units of sound which go to make up a word; phonemic awareness is the ability to hear sounds in our head and to categorise them, and is not directly about print. "Phonics" is about the relationship between sounds and print. . . . Unless you have phonemic awareness, therefore, it is impossible to learn "phonics". (1992, 19)

The second vital understanding, he says, is the use of analogies, the ability to transfer insight from one word into a similar one.

> What I want to suggest is that as children practise their reading not only do they develop their knowledge of the world, and widen their knowledge of language, text types, and print conventions, they also use analogies to increase gradually the store of words they can recognise easily and rapidly. (1992, 21)

Phonemic awareness is one form of understanding of conventions, an awareness of the assorted counters which make up a language. Using analogies is clearly a process. What makes Harrison's article so interesting is the firm way in which he describes how young children acquire these understandings of conventions and processes from the practice of hearing, singing and learning nursery rhymes. He cites work by Bryant *et al.* which establishes what he describes as clear evidence of a causal connection between familiarity with nursery rhymes and the development of phonemic awareness.

> What Bryant and his co-workers found was that children's knowledge of nursery rhymes did indeed predict success in reading and spelling two to three years later, and, more importantly, that this connection was not the result of differences in the children's intelligence or social background, or even in their initial phonological knowledge, because all these variables were controlled. What Bryant argued was that familiarity with nursery rhymes was what enabled children to become familiar with rhymes, which in turn led to their acquiring phonological awareness, which in turn helped them to succeed in reading. (1992, 21)

Practices first, followed by the sorting out of patterns, conventions, and the activities of reading; it reads like a model case. Harrison goes on to describe the child learning to read.

> Initially, as most parents know, children begin by "reading" books they know off by heart. . . . This is indeed reading, though at an elementary level; children can match the words on the page to the words of a story they know and enjoy. A word is read as a whole, without any phonemic segmentation, and words are matched by rote association with those in the story. . . . At the same time, they become more familiar with words in a wide range of contexts, as labels, on posters, on displays and in new books. The teacher reads books to and with the children, encourages the learning of letters and sounds through games, stories and poems, and begins to develop early writing activities. But at this first stage a child's reading is very context dependent. . . .
>
> Then comes the "click". This second stage is in some ways the most exciting for the child, the teacher and the parents. Following models of active meaning-making which the teacher and others have provided, children begin to do three things at once: they begin to use context to make predictions about what is happening in a story, they begin to use semantic and syntactic cues to help make predictions about individual words, and they also begin to make rudimentary analogies in order to help in word recognition. This is when real reading begins, and when the encouragement of intelligent guessing is enormously helpful to the beginning reader, for

> there must be guessing at this stage. What will make the guessing most valuable will be feedback, discussion and encouragement. Wild guessing can lead to frustration, but if there is a supportive dialogue between the beginning reader and a fluent reader, the beginner can learn from the model of the fluent reader how meaning is built up and how guessing can best be used. The use of analogies is crude at this stage. . . . Nevertheless, one can appreciate the crucial part played by phonemic awareness in making analogies even at this early stage. Children can only make this type of simple analogy if they have the ability to hear the sound of the first phoneme in a word and transfer it to another context. (1992, 21 - 22)

Harrison says that more fluent readers actually process nearly every word and resort to guessing or the use of context cues only when the automatic processing of words by sight and by analogy fails them. The orchestration of top-down and bottom-up processing has begun. In his description of the child moving from practice and experience to a first clumsy use of conventions and processes of reading (and also in his account of the crucial importance of the more competent assistant), he provides a stimulating example of learning in action.

The pattern-making brain

Marilyn Cooper's description of conventions as resulting chiefly or only from instruction does not pay enough attention to the way the brain sorts out rules for itself, making patterns (explicit and tacit) out of accumulated experiences or practices. According to Leslie Hart, the brain specialises in exactly that kind of accumulating and sifting.

> [T]he brain is, by nature's design, an amazingly subtle and sensitive *pattern-detecting* apparatus.
>
> The brain detects, constructs, and elaborates patterns as a basic, built-in, natural function. It does not have to be taught or motivated to do so, any more than the heart needs to be instructed or coaxed to pump blood. In fact, efforts to teach or motivate the pattern detection, however well meant, may have inhibiting and negative effects. (1983, 60)

Hart goes on to describe how the brain uses both sensory input and previous experience.

> In practice our pattern-detecting ability depends on clues from vision, hearing, touch, or other senses, on the behavior and relationships, on the situation. In short, *the ability depends heavily on our experience, on what we bring to the act of pattern detection and recognition.* The more experience tells us what we are likely to be looking at, or dealing with, the less detailed, feature-type of information we need to jump to a probably correct conclusion. (1983, 64)

Hart goes further and describes an activity of the brain which obviously has importance for the reading process. He refers to

> the detection and recognition of patterns *within* patterns, which leads to finer

> and finer discriminations, or what can be called *categorizing down*, a most important aspect of learning. Thus one can detect the pattern "animal," then categorize it down to "dog," and then to "Afghan hound." Or observing a number of people at a gathering, it may be categorized further by noting that the people are festive to "party," and then on seeing a cake with candles to "birthday party." But we must note that a person coming from a country where birthday cakes are not a custom would not be prepared to interpret that clue the way we so easily do. Again, what the observer *brings* to the recognition act in experience, in previously acquired knowledge, plays a critical part. (1983, 64)

Obviously small children have the most sorting out to do and the least experience to apply. However, even children as young as three appear to have and make active use of scripts, event schemata which provide overarching categories for grouping together different and discrete activities by means of their common features. Children as young as three and four differentiate between a script and a story by grammatical means; a script is told using the second person and the present tense while a personal narrative uses the past tense and is told from the perspective of a participant. (Hudson and Shapiro, 1991) The schematic aspects of the script version seem quite clear: the "you" is a fairly featureless stand-in for any real individual with a name and a personality; these small children are instead referring to general structures of events.

Hart points out how much of this kind of categorising and labelling goes on with little planning or feedback:

> The ability that even infants have to gradually sort out an extremely complex, changing world must be considered astounding, as well as evidence that this is the natural way learning advances. But more surprising still is the clear fact that the learner manages to learn *from input presented in a completely random, fortuitous fashion*--unplanned, accidental, unordered, uncontrolled.
>
> Consider, for example, the sorting-out problem a child has to grasp such patterns as *dessert, pie,* and *cake.* Since a great variety of dishes may constitute dessert, the child must extract the idea that meals have a sequence (programs) and dessert is the last course. It must also learn that *dessert* does *not* mean a particular dish, or even a tight group or class of dishes. *Pie* presents few problems to an adult with years of experience to draw on, but to a toddler an open pumpkin pie, a crusted blueberry pie, and a lemon pie heaped with meringue topping present little in common. Or does *pie* mean *round*, the most obvious feature? Unfortunately many desserts are round, particularly cakes--which vary from pie-like cheesecake, to coffee cake, to layered birthday cake elaborately iced and decorated.
>
> While adults and older siblings may provide gentle casual, and almost incidental corrective feedback when the child calls a pie a cake or does not regard a fruit dish as dessert and cries in frustration, it would be most unusual for anything much resembling teaching or instruction to deal with dessert, pie, and cake as subjects. Yet in a few years, from this confused, random exposure and experience, the child has extracted the patterns, gradually coming to see which features and relationships have significance in which settings, and which can be ignored. (1983, 65)

Obviously, the accumulation of understandings that is used to develop patterns in the brain can be facilitated by the input of more abstract rules and also by feedback, either the casual kind referred to by Hart or the more organized variety that occurs in instructional settings.

Furthermore, practice does not wait upon a complete working-out of a schema or a script. The toddler, engaged in profound intellectual work on the ramifications of the dessert problem, learns very early on to eat and enjoy the sweet course. Donald Fry describes this process at work in the learning of reading:

> Even before we can read, we behave like readers. Very young children borrow books from libraries, go to bookshops, and number books amongst their possessions. They pick up their comics at the newsagents, choose from catalogues, and begin to make out the differences between timetables and maps and recipes and other things that they see their parents using. They handle and arrange books, turning over the pages which they cannot yet read, but which they recognise. They play at reading, accompanying their turning of pages with their own version of the story: perhaps they read aloud to toys, to an imaginary playgroup or an invisible friend. They play at writing, too, making "books", or seeing their own words made into writing by adults and being read. They already know about books, naming titles, recognising books and series of books. And, of course, they attend to stories that are read to them, at home and elsewhere, feeling themselves to be part of a community that reads, and coming into the sure possession of what a story is and what a story does. They see themselves as readers, and we could say that unless they do so, and are encouraged to do so, they will not learn to read.
>
> These activities are the social transactions that precede and surround the private act of reading itself. The young readers in this study have established their own routines and preferences amongst these activities, and their different personalities as readers are partly defined by them. (1985, 94)

Colin Harrison, discussing what children need to learn in order to become readers, confirms this insight:

> The most fundamental aspects of learning to read are not about skills; they are about learning to behave like a reader. Successful readers pick up books, curl up with them on easy chairs, worry or get excited about what is going to happen to the characters in a story, and later talk spontaneously about what they have been reading to their parents or their friends. (1992, 13)

Anne M. Bussis and her colleagues at the Educational Testing Service in Princeton mounted a longitudinal study of beginning readers, and their report makes a number of useful observations about the complexity of how we learn to read. They would probably not dispute the importance of the points raised so far, but they call for clarity about how knowledge develops out of exposure to patterns and to kinds of activity. They talk about a distinction between heeding and knowing.

> A person could conceivably pay attention to a particular kind of information for years without ever discerning a pattern that unifies the information or relates it to other meaningful patterns. Such an outcome is not only theoretically possible, it is quite probable if the information a person heeds consists only of isolated fragments of an event. Although sufficient attention

> to information is a necessary condition of knowledge acquisition, it guarantees nothing in and of itself. Information must be rich enough to encompass the relevant relationships to be learned. The brain, in effect, is an exquisitely designed pattern detector, but it depends on adequate information to work efficiently.
>
> The data of written language contain information that is crucial to reading, and the beginning reader must figure out what it means. This task involves separating irrelevant data (the size and style of print, for example) from potentially meaningful events, and then detecting patterns that make the potentially meaningful events predictable and interpretable. The word "events" is used advisedly in the last sentence, because most phenomena (including writing) are distinguished by more than one set of relationships. Typically, patterns overlap to produce redundancy in the informational events that comprise and define a particular phenomenon. (1985, 66)

What we do not know about discourse practice is *how much* experience is essential before a learning reader can begin usefully to apply the conventions which attend print use. If there is such a thing as a critical mass of exposure to print, we do not know what it is, although we may suspect that it varies from one reader to another.

Symbolic resources and representation

Small children must come to terms not merely with the specific experiences they encounter in their own surroundings. They must also make sense of the universal capacity of humans to make representations of that experience.

A representation can be defined as a description of an aspect or aspects of experience by symbolic means. All human languages are systems of representation; the word stands for the object or experience and we arrange these words to make meanings. Probably the most vivid and explicit descriptions of a human suddenly registering the power of representation are the written and filmed accounts of the blind and deaf Helen Keller suddenly making the discovery that the water from the pump could be referred to by specific sign language motions of her hand.

Babies make many such discoveries. They are known to be more intrigued by patterns which include the basic components of the human face than by random distributions of exactly the same number of lines and dots. They start learning language before the end of their first year. Babies who are exposed to picture books reach out to pat the flat pictures. Television screens attract them, as do mobiles.

Perhaps some of the fascination of mirrors for babies is the access they offer to the contrast between image and reality. A mirror image does not really qualify as a representation since it works by laws of physics rather than by rules of representation. A mirror image does not appear by symbolic means. Nevertheless, it does allow the infant some early experience of distinguishing between the original and the facsimile, experience that may be put to broader use as the child comes to terms with our multiple arenas of representation.

David Buckingham uses the useful phrase, "symbolic resource." (1993, 13) Contemporary babies have many symbolic resources at their disposal, and many of them are composed of representations of their own familiar lives. I watched a two-year-old, sitting in a family gathering to see a home video, turn around to check that the Grandma behind him was still there, as he perceived the "same" Grandma on the screen. My daughters, from the age of two onwards, treasured the scrapbooks which held the artifacts of their modest lives: drawings, photographs, ticket stubs, invitations, and "letters" from their grandfather, composed of cut-up pictures and signed with kisses. Western toddlers also own video tapes, audio tapes, books and toys featuring their favourite fictional characters. Their educational toys and books offer them early access to such representational schemes as number and shape, and their little tool benches and building bricks are representations of adult materials. Out of this richness of symbolic resource, they develop understandings of how particular systems work, including the system of reading.

Even toddlers' relationships to representations need not be passive. I remember a day another small child came to stay with me. He was just barely two and very unhappy; the evening before, his father had slipped on some ice and broken his ankle. The child was waiting in the car with his mother when it happened, and, of necessity, had accompanied his parents to the emergency room. Seeing his father in pain and his mother in distress had greatly disturbed him, and, when his father was detained in hospital, he was extremely upset. The next day his mother brought him to me for a while, so she could go back to the hospital without him.

The inevitable diaper bag came too, and, in one of the pockets, by accident or design, was a set of photographs taken at the child's second birthday, ten days before. After much restless roaming around, the little boy found these pictures and selected a photo of both his parents together. He brought this to me and settled himself firmly on my lap, holding the picture and staring at it with an intensity that seemed to combine a mixture of grief and hope. My daughters approached, offering distractions; he pushed them away.

The photograph is, at one level, a representation produced by a series of machines. To this child, however, it clearly stood in for his temporarily lost mother and father. The piece of paper he held showed his parents two-dimensionally, deprived of animation and voice; it shared the partial and re-created nature of all forms of representation. The symbolic power of this representation for this small child, however, was palpable; as was the fact that such power was not something passive but something which he actually *used*, actively and intensely, for his comfort in a time of great need. He invested the picture with affective power.

I tell this story to emphasize the purposive nature and potential of representation; it is not a simple convenience, a kind of shrinking of the world to make it fit inside our heads. What we can represent, we can manipulate in our minds, we can use to create alternatives and variations. The relationship between a representation and its original will never be clear-cut; there is no outside arbiter to judge on goodness of fit, so the question is essentially uninteresting. What is interesting is how we can use such representations. Pamela McCorduck suggests, "[H]uman consciousness develops by being able to envisage alternative realities." (1992, 258)

Very small children can use representations to guide and alter their actions; even at a young age, they need not be bound by their own experiential limits. Michael Kirby, writing a book review, describes an example of the power of representation:

> When my elder daughter was about three we tried to teach her to swim. The exercise was fairly unsuccessful, the breakthrough coming only when we bought her a book, *Topsy and Tim learn to swim*. "I know what to do now," she announced after she had read it, and the next time she was taken into the toddler pool, she promptly left Daddy and sped off towards Mummy, some distance away, to the amazement of both. It was a graphic illustration of the power of the book to help even very young children make sense of the world in areas which are difficult to understand. (1994, 127)

The practice came first in that Michael Kirby's daughter had some experience of the swimming pool before she looked at the book. Nevertheless, this particular symbolic resource enabled her to grasp the pattern and structure of what she was supposed to be attempting; her acquaintance with the representations involved in *Topsy and Tim* could never thereafter be subtracted from her abilities in the water.

The issue of representation has been addressed from a number of perspectives with respect to reading. As usual, this leads to an assortment of disagreements in terms of definition and priority. Kendall Walton chooses to define representation in terms of fiction. (1990, 3) He defines representations as "things with the function of being props in games of make-believe." (1990, 53 - 54) Umberto Eco challenges the elimination of non-fiction from the territory of representations. He comments,

> The way we accept the representation of the actual world scarcely differs from the way we accept the representation of fictional worlds. I pretend to believe that Scarlett married Rhett, just as I pretend to take as a matter of personal experience that Napoleon married Josephine. Obviously the difference lies in the degree of this trust: the trust I give Margaret Mitchell is different from the trust I give historians. Only when I read a fable do I accept that wolves speak; the rest of the time I behave as if the wolves in question are those described by the latest International Congress of the Zoological Society. (1994, 90)

Charles Perfetti, discussing early reading, explores a different definition of the word:

> The general form of the representation question is: How are words represented in the mind? It may be possible to have a theory of reading acquisition without addressing the representation of words. . . . But behind any process of pattern recognition is the form of knowledge that allows recognition. This is the representation question. The access question is how a printed word comes to cause a reader's mental representation of a word to be activated and accessed by a printed stimulus. (1992, 146)

The blurriness caused by the different uses of the word *representation* are actually helpful, in my opinion. In these contradictory but overlapping definitions, we can see some of the paradoxical, generative power of reading at work. The word represents a mental image of some sort. The ways in which we can consider and manipulate the word offer us a variety of ways of ordering and considering the world of our experience. The boundaries between the word and the experience are never clear-cut; to some extent we see what the words of our society enable us to see.

Umberto Eco gives an example of this relationship at work, in one of his Norton lectures.

> We think we usually know the real world through experience; we think it is a matter of experience that today is Wednesday, April 14, 1993, and that at this moment I'm wearing a blue tie. As a matter of fact, it is true that today is April 14, 1993, only within the framework of the Gregorian calendar, and my tie is blue only according to the Western division of the chromatic spectrum (it is well known that in the Latin and Greek cultures the boundaries between green and blue were different from the ones that obtain in our own culture). (1994, 88)

The relationship between language and experience is, on the one hand, murky and underdetermined, on the other hand, powerful and generative. Processing the print on the page gives us detailed access to the way in which someone else, the writer, has explored the boundaries.

As well as acquiring a general understanding of how we may make representations for ourselves, children must come to grips with a broad idea of the specific representative powers of print. Marilyn Jager Adams has described this process so clearly that, even at the expense of a very long quotation, it seems worthwhile to cite her account in full:

> At some point, children must gain the insight that *print is categorically different from other kinds of visual patterns in their environment.* In some vague but characteristic way, it is visually distinct from other sorts of pictures and patterns. On each occurrence, what it looks like, more than anything else, is other print. And though it seems iconically inscrutable--it contains no familiar, legible pictorial information--adults, quite mysteriously, can extract meaning from it.
>
> However it works, *print is print across any of a variety of physical media.* It can appear on paper, fabric, television screens, signs, boxes, and walls. It can be colorful or black and white; there can be lots and lots or just a little; it can be accompanied with lots of pictures or none at all. It can be formed of ink or paint, plastic letters, electronic lights, or finger marks in dirt. Sometimes it is made by hand, sometimes obviously not. However it is made and wherever it occurs, it still seems to be print.
>
> Once you notice it, *print seems to be all over the place*--not just in books and on newspapers, but on storefronts, trucks, envelopes, cookies, coins, tickets, boxes, bottles, cans, signs, and household appliances. It appears at the beginnings and ends of your television shows (that is how you know they are over) and on the ads in between (that is when you are afraid they are over). It is inside your clothes and outside your shoes. It is even stamped on the backs of your dolls' necks and on the tops of your blocks. (1990, 334)

I showed this passage to a colleague who, when she reached this line, stopped with an expression of acute recognition: when she was six and had just learned to read, she named her doll Pat. Pending, citing the evidence printed on the doll's neck.

Adams continues:

> *Different samples of print are used by adults in different ways.* They read picture books aloud to you but newspapers and no-picture books to themselves. They read signs, labels, and tags in stores, and they announce decisions when they are done. And there is lots of print that they seem to ignore, but they will tell you what it says if you ask them to. And someplace in here, the child must induce that *print symbolizes language.*
>
> *There appear, moreover, to be different categories of printed materials, each with their own characteristic appearances and uses.* Besides books, magazines, and newspapers, there are signs, labels, instructions, telephone books, lists, price tags, and menus. There is print of [*sic*] the outsides of envelopes and print on the insides: party invitations, cards from your grandparents, and who-knows-what in the grown-ups' envelopes.
>
> And *print holds information*: the stories in your books, the grocery list, the instructions to your toys, the flavors of ice cream that can be had, the messages on your cards, your friend's telephone number, the time of the movie, whether there is anything good on TV, whether you have to take a sweater, and the note from your teacher (when you were so glad that she didn't say anything before you left).
>
> Finally, *print can be produced by anyone.* There are pencils, pens, crayons, and markers that you can do it with, though it is strongly preferred that you do it on paper. Grown-ups are pleased when you write, though they can't always read it. There seems to be more to producing it than might appear. (1990, 334 - 335)

Obviously, Adams is describing a particular environment, where print is both ubiquitous and valued. Not all children are raised in such a setting, and, whatever their disagreements over methods, most reading researchers agree that a crucial element in the ease with which a child learns to read depends, in part, on the background of exposure to all kinds of writing. Without a solid base of experience first, the descriptive and procedural power of the rules cannot be so usefully applied.

What is implied in Adams' account is a very suggestive question. Is unlabelled, unmarked experience sufficient? "Once you notice it, *print seems to be all over the place*," she says. All Western children live in an environment where print is indeed all over the place. What makes such print salient to small children? What makes them start to notice it? The scaffolding adult points out the words on the grocery list, the fixed order of the story, the utility of the telephone book. Already the child is beginning to filter examples of practice through the grid of particular conventions and processes, focusing the contribution of experiences through the channels which foster particular kinds of development.

With a supporting adult, the child can also participate in the production of print earlier than Adams seems to be allowing for, even in her extensive description. My daughter, at the age of three, took a favourite puppet to playschool. She knew that any toy which went to school had to be labelled with her name, but this time she wanted to say more: "Write, This is Jack. He is vallable," she said, as we stuck the label to the stick. Of course we obeyed, and she reinforced an idea, clearly already present in her head, that you can use print to assert, to name, to establish values, to claim priorities. In such circumstances, print gains a social and affective power even greater than the many kinds Adams describes. My daughter was not merely learning about representation, she was also learning to represent.

The power of representing is not a neutral one. A representation of any complexity is shaped as a result of decisions made by the representor, and this has consequences. When we talk about reading, we must remember that we are talking about ways of dealing with a particular selection of words, choices made earlier by the author. In their major study of learning readers, Bussis *et al.* show that even beginners respond differentially to authorial priorities. They found their young readers to be highly sensitive to such aspects of the text as rhythm and sentence structure, altering the way they dealt with the text according to their assessment of the text's structure. They made different kinds of attempts and errors in reading a story written to emphasise phonic cues (*Ben Bug*) and a story written more for plot (*Big Dog, Little Dog*). The differences in their responses were particularly marked, even dramatic, in the early stages of the text.

> This finding implies that children immediately sensed the kind of book they were being asked to read and organized their efforts accordingly. They relied more on the grammar and sense of the story line to work their way into *Big Dog*, and they looked almost exclusively to graphic cues for initial support in *Ben Bug*. Once started in the book, however, the children settled into a more balanced allocation of attention and resources.
>
> .... We believe this finding reflects an adaptive capacity of the orchestration process--a capacity which must be truly remarkable in mature readers if it operates with such demonstrable sensitivity in beginning readers. . . .
>
> That children respond differently to phonic texts and trade books is probably no news to teachers who have listened to them read both types of material. But we think the finding is of interest from a theoretical standpoint, because it suggests that beginning readers make adaptive adjustments to text variation in much the same manner as mature readers. That is, they display the ability to "shift gears". (1985, 133)

Social and political environments

If an understanding of the conventions that make reading work is developed out of many instances of practice, then we must take into account the social settings in which such practices occur. The toddler coming to grips with the concept of dessert is functioning within a particular social framework, with dessert taking a place of greater or lesser ritual and gastronomic importance in the family culture. Furthermore, there are parents eager to feed in information in doses carefully calibrated to the child's ability to absorb--or there are siblings who are brusque and impatient--or nobody thinks ever to explain anything about dessert to a particular child.

McCabe and Peterson (1991) have explored variations in small children's capacities to tell stories and related these to specific ways in which their parents interacted with them. A parent who regularly switched topics when a child was developing a narrative did not elicit progress to the same extent as a parent who simply repeated the child's account--and the parent whose style involved non-confrontational topic extension elicited more complex stories again. These different tactics may or may not involve conscious decision-making on the part of the parents, but the study gives one small picture of development through different kinds of social interaction. Whitehurst *et al.* made a similar finding when they investigated experimental and control groups of small children with middle-class and highly motivated parents who read to their children a great deal. The parents in the experimental group were trained to make their questions and comments more open-ended as they read with their children. The researchers report,

> We have shown experimentally that how parents talk to their children makes a difference in language development and have demonstrated this in the home by changing the frequencies of naturally occurring categories of stimulation. (1988, 558)

Social forces are powerful but they are not neutral. The balance of power and authority in any social relationship influences our activities and reactions whether we are conscious of them or not. Michael Apple succinctly describes one such set of forces:

> All of our discourses (a word used to signify the system of relations between parties engaged in communicative activity and a concept that, hence, meant to signal the inescapably political contexts in which we speak and work) are "politically uninnocent." They occur within a shifting and dynamic social context in which the existence of multiple sets of power relations are inevitable. Discourse and politics, knowledge and power, are, hence, part of an indissoluble couplet. (1991, vii)

"Politics," used as Apple uses the word, sounds like a macro-force, abstract and external. However, Margaret Donaldson convincingly describes very small children making decisions about Piaget's version of a conservation test. Two sticks of equal length are placed side by side and the child is asked if they are equal. If the child agrees, one stick is moved by the adult experimenter, thus destroying the alignment. The child is asked if the sticks are still the same length; if the answer is yes, the child is able to "conserve."

When exposed to this standard test, children under the age of seven commonly fail to conserve. Piaget took this as evidence of incomplete mental development at this age. Donaldson questions this assessment and quotes examples of experiments where a slight change in approach led to considerably different results. The most appealing of these is one where the change in the configuration of the sticks is made by "Naughty Teddy," who does not carry the social authority of the experimenter and may seem to the child to be less likely to produce substantive change with his antics. An alteration in the *agent* of change should not make an intellectual difference in the result if we are talking about purely mental development, says Donaldson.

> But suppose that the child is not concerned to weight specially what the words of the question mean in isolation. Suppose he is rather interpreting the whole situation: what the experimenter says, what he does, what he may reasonably be thought to intend. Now recall that at stage two the experimenter draws attention to an action whereby he changes the array that the child is considering. "Watch this," he says. Is it not then reasonable that the child should think this change will be relevant to what follows--to the

> next question which will be asked? (1978, 63)

In other words, the child is taking into account the politics of the whole situation, the authority of the adult, the likelihood that such an important grown-up could meddle with the sticks *without* making some substantive change. Children, by virtue of their extreme dependency, are actually very alert to the very local politics of their specific surroundings.

Apple, of course, is referring to a wider scale of things when he speaks of politics and power. However, at all levels, our pattern construction occurs within an unequal set of power forces; children simply have the smallest number of choices--and perhaps a correspondingly acute, if inarticulate, perception of the power relationships which surround them.

Specific reading events take place within an unbalanced power relationship as well. One famous reading story comes from Stanley Fish, who perhaps pays less attention to the politics of his anecdote than he might. Fish describes the day when he ran two summer school classes in the same classroom. The second class, studying English religious poetry of the seventeenth century, arrived to find a list on the blackboard of names of linguists which had been written there during the first class. "In the time between the two classes I made only one change. I drew a frame around the assignment and wrote on the top of that frame 'p.43.'" (1980, 323)

Fish then informed his students that this list constituted a religious poem similar to the ones they had already studied, and they predictably began to interpret this "work" according to the conventions they had learned.

Fish outlines the many ingenious readings supplied by his students and then says:

> I am less interested in the details of the performance than in the ability of my students to perform it. What is the source of that ability? How is it that they were able to do what they did? What is it that they did? (1980, 325)

What those students did was interpret the entire social and political situation along with the text. A professor as important as Stanley Fish authoritatively assured them that there was a particular kind of meaning in this list; given the politics of the classroom, it is in their interest to find or invent it. Perhaps Fish should re-run his trial by referring to the work of Margaret Donaldson and telling his students that Naughty Teddy wrote these words on the blackboard; it would be interesting to see how much of their interpretive ingenuity survived.

Fish's point about the community of interpreters, which he derives from this experiment, is a valid and useful contribution. However, the community he describes is implausibly apolitical:

> [W]e have readers whose consciousnesses are constituted by a set of conventional notions which when put into operation constitute in turn a conventional, and conventionally seen, object. My students could do what they did, and do it in unison, because as members of a literary community they knew what a poem was (their knowledge was public) and that knowledge led them to look in such a way as to populate the landscape with what they

> knew to be poems. (1980, 332)

The students not only "knew what a poem was;" they knew what a famous professor was as well, and Fish is perhaps disingenuous in overlooking that aspect of the equation.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the validity and importance of the many communities of interpreters to which readers belong. Fish describes a public exercise, but the efforts and conventional understandings of a particular community are often internalised. Vygotsky has provided the classic description of this process:

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first *between* people (*interpsychological*), and then *inside* the child (*intrapsychological*). (1978, 57)

As we work towards an understanding of how people develop patterns--conventions, schemata, abstractions--from recurrent practices, it is useful to keep in mind that it is just about impossible to imagine a *practice* separated from the human politics which surround it. The conventions which a person works out from such occurrences, however, are, by their very nature, much more sanitised. They are meant to apply in numerous political situations and their abstract nature can often obscure (but not extinguish) their original political roots.

Of course, we all belong not just to specific and local communities of interpreters, but also to wider societies and more general ideological frameworks. We cannot ignore the importance of how readers are situated culturally, socially, and historically; nor can we overlook the fact that the texts they read are similarly rooted. There are numerous complex accounts of the political aspect of reading; Kathleen McCormick's summary captures many elements of this perspective on reading:

> Reading is never just an individual, subjective experience. While it may be usefully described as a cognitive activity, reading, like every act of cognition, always occurs in social contexts. . . . Reading is always overdetermined, that is, it is produced by many, perhaps an unaccountably large, number of factors that work in different combinations to produce different interpretations. A text is always a site of struggle: it may try to privilege a particular reading position as "natural," but because readers are subjects in their own histories, they may not produce that seemingly privileged reading. Yet readers do not possess absolute autonomy: like the texts they read, they too are sites of struggle, caught up in cultural determinants that they did not create and in which they strive to make meaning.
>
> This interactive model of reading, then, stresses that first, both readers and text contribute to the reading process and second, that both text and readers are themselves ideologically situated. (1994, 69)

Affective power

Just as practice always occurs in a particular social and political environment, equally it is impossible to imagine a practice which is not drenched in affect, even if the emotion involved is not a dramatic one. Norman Holland argues that emotions are the decisive and crucial aspect of all decision-making. "Emotions guide the whole system." (1988, 79)

> The brain charges raw sensory data with emotion, because there are connections from the cortex, the sensory part of the brain, into the limbic system which is involved in emotional functions and with sweating, heartbeat, breathing, and the other signs of emotion.
>
> What complicates the picture is that these connections are two-way. (1988, 80)

He gives the example of intense emotional kinship ties; these emotionally charged relationships become integrated into the cognitive systems of our social structures. It becomes very difficult to disentangle the affective aspects of our cognitive decisions. Limbic functions are channelled into cognitive activities but the process is two-way and cognitive activities can also modulate our emotions.

> Even if the cognitive response to a hazard seems programmed and automatic, the emotional answer will be individual and personal. Feelings, mammalian in origin but individual in practice, govern and direct human feedback. What sets the standard, our desire, is "subjective," or, to be more precise, we can think of it as identity or a function of identity, a pathway between cortex and limbic system. Moveover--and this is the importance of the research into the limbic system--*cognition is evolutionarily, biologically, and physically connected to emotion.* (1988, 85)

Holland explains how affect impinges on attention and memory: "Emotion is central to heeding and remembering data, a literary text, for example. What we do not care about, we neither pay attention to nor remember." (1988, 81)

Again, the importance for *practices* is substantial. The more I look at reading histories, or specific accounts of specific readings of specific texts, the more primary the importance of affect appears to be. According to Bruner, Bartlett has argued that we organize our personal memories by affect. This accords with my own experience and with other people's stories.

How does the theoretical importance of affect manifest itself in the specifics of reading fiction? Mary Louise Pratt considers that one prime ingredient in the contract between teller and told is that a story should be *tellable*: worth the telling, containing some emotional importance or truth. The teller of the story is warding off the dismissive reaction of "So what?" Pratt observes that this is true of what she calls natural narrative (the kind which arises in conversation) as well as the more crafted forms of literature.

> Like the natural narrator, the speaker of a literary work is understood to be displaying an experience or a state of affairs, creating a verbal version in which he, and we along with him, contemplate, explore, interpret, and

> evaluate, seeking pleasure and interpretive consensus. As with natural narratives, we expect literary works to be tellable. We expect narrative literary works to deal with people in situations of unusual conflict and stress, unusual for the characters if not for us. Even in the absence of explicit plot, we tend to assume that lyric poems, for example, present and explore states of affairs, states of mind, or emotive experiences that are assumed to be unusual or problematic. (1977, 140 - 141)

Jerome Bruner suggests that our definition of tellability involves our communally developed sense of expectation and surprise, and that stories develop from and contribute to our social assumption of what is normal and what is worth talking about.

> Folk psychology is invested in canonicality. It focuses upon the expectable and/or the usual in the human condition. It endows these with legitimacy or authority. Yet it has powerful means that are purpose-built for rendering the exceptional and the unusual into comprehensible form. For . . . the viability of a culture inheres in its capacity for resolving conflicts, for explicating differences and renegotiating communal meanings. The "negotiated meanings" discussed by social anthropologists or culture critics as essential to the conduct of a culture are made possible by narrative's apparatus for dealing simultaneously with canonicality and exceptionality. Thus, while a culture must contain a set of norms, it must also contain a set of interpretive procedures for rendering departures from those norms meaningful in terms of established patterns of belief. It is narrative and narrative interpretation upon which folk psychology depends for achieving this kind of meaning. (1990, 47)

Although Bruner is talking about folk psychology and memory, his theories cast a helpful light on the reading process as well.

> I want to turn now to the role of narrativized folk psychology in what, broadly, might be called the "organization of experience." Two matters interest me particularly. One of them, rather traditional, is usually called *framing* or schematizing, the other is *affect regulation*. Framing provides a means of "constructing" a world, of characterizing its flow, of segmenting events within that world, and so on. If we were not able to do such framing, we would be lost in a murk of chaotic experience and probably would not have survived as a species in any case.
>
> The typical form of framing experience (and our memory of it) is in narrative form, and . . . what does *not* get structured narratively suffers loss in memory. Framing pursues experience into memory where . . . it is systematically altered to conform to our canonical representations of the social world, or if it cannot be so altered, it is either forgotten or highlighted in its exceptionality. (1990, 55 - 56)

Bruner goes on to cite Bartlett and others about the social nature of such framing which is designed for the sharing of memory within a culture rather than simple individual storage. Particular social biases condition what an individual first notices and then stores. According to Bartlett, society does this in two ways.

> First by providing that setting of interest, excitement, and emotion which favors the development of specific images, and secondly by providing a persistent framework of institutions and customs which acts as a schematic basis for constructive memory. (quoted in Bruner 1990, 57)

"The very structure of our lexicon," says Bruner, "while it may not force us to code human events in a particular way, certainly predisposes us to be culturally canonical." (1990, 58)

These comments are culturally very general. Bussis *et al.* provide an interesting example of the way affect may work in organizing the responses of even very new readers. They describe a number of young readers dealing with a book in which a small boy is rejected by some older boys and later, in a very elliptical way, gains his revenge. According to these researchers, children drew on their affective and social knowledge of the world to help with their processing of the story.

> Several interesting things happened with *Blackboard Bear.* First, every single child recognized the theme of rejection and retribution, even though the text does not explicitly state that the little boy is "getting even" with the older boys. The children's comments during the reading as well as in retelling the story indicated that they knew how the boy felt when he threw the teddy bear out the window (hurt, anger, disgust) and why he did not let the older boys hold the bear's leash, pat him, or ride on him. (1985, 76)

The ending of this story is subtle and conveyed only by implication, and a number of the children missed it. However, Bussis *et al.* suggest that the children's affective connection with the story had actual implications for how well they read it.

> As a rule, the less proficient readers would begin reading an unfamiliar book (which *Blackboard Bear* was for all the children) with some degree of caution, as if they wanted to "feel their way" into the text. Some typically negotiated unfamiliar books at a deliberate, almost word-by-word pace. Yet many of these same children read the first short line of text ("Can I play?") with uncommon ease, and everyone in the group read the line fluently on the second encounter. The children also picked up other phrases during the course of the reading and uttered them with appropriate expression: "Of course not." "You're too little." "You can't." "He only lets me." Although the last page of text does not contain these phrases, the less proficient readers tended to continue reading accurately and with greater fluency than was typical of them.
>
> Our impression [was] that the children's understanding of this story facilitated their actual reading of the text. (1985, 78)

This case seems to me to be a useful example of some issues of "tellability." Clearly, an opening sentence of "Can I play?" very successfully wards off the reaction of "So what?" for these young readers. The shaping of powerful emotions is something that story can offer to the very young as well as to the rest of us.

Affect is an element in the ambivalent quality of the experience we get from reading. Susanne Langer famously referred to literature as "virtual experience" but Peter Medway and Andrew Stibbs challenge a simplistic interpretation of this idea.

> [T]he experiences offered by books are not the same as experiences of the sorts of realities they describe. Readers may feel *pity for* a dying character, but they do not feel the same *pain* as the dying character, nor indeed the same pity as for a person who is really dying. (1990, 77)

There are two ways of dealing with this observation. One is simply to agree, but the other is to argue that the word "virtual" actually encompasses exactly the distinction they describe. In any case, Medway and Stibbs do allow for the powerful nature of engagement with fiction.

> The powerful metaphors of engagement with fiction--"immerse", "lose", "devour", "transport", "identify with"--are too consistent and common to be dismissed. Also some novels are intended to, and in fact do, have an effect in the real world by creating representations we take as essentially true--*Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Stowe, 1852) and the novels of Dickens did awaken consciences and produce reforms. Something of the realist cause, therefore, has to be conceded. It would show a misunderstanding of the nature of fiction to suppress in ourselves and our students our natural inclination to talk about characters in novels in the same (celebratory, anticipatory, evaluative) ways as we talk about our friends and acquaintances, even though we should want them also to be aware of the constructedness of characters. (1990, 77)

Perhaps the answer lies in D.W. Harding's account of the spectator role. Certainly even a short quote raises topics already covered in this chapter under more than one heading:

> Part of everyone's time is spent in looking on at events, not primarily in order to understand them (though that may come in) and not in preparation for doing something about them, but in a non-participant relation which yet includes an active evaluative attitude. We can say two things of the onlooker: first, that he attends, whether his attention amounts to a passing glance or fascinated absorption; and second, that he evaluates, whether his attitude is one of faint liking or disliking, hardly above indifference, or strong, perhaps intensely emotional, and perhaps differentiated into pity, horror, contempt, respect, amusement, or any other of the shades and kinds of evaluation, most of them unlabelled even in our richly differentiated language. Attentiveness on any particular occasion implies the existence of an interest, if we take that to mean an enduring disposition to respond, in whatever way, to some class of objects or events. The response almost instantaneously becomes (or is from the start) evaluative, welcoming or aversive. (1962/77, 59 - 60)

Our relationship with a text can be described in affective terms: engrossed, "lost," bored, dutiful. This relationship is governed both by our external circumstances--how comfortably we are sitting, how free we are to ignore the world, how voluntarily we have selected our text--and also by our understanding of and engagement with the affective *content* of the text.

Speech act theory and pragmatics

The power of affect is amorphous and all-encompassing; the pervasiveness of social and political pressure is inescapable. However, even such powerful and shapeless forces are, to some extent, culturally controlled and conditioned. No relationship between two people, either face to face or more indirect, can be entirely detached from the weight of social and affective baggage; what we do, instead, is find ways of governing such interactions by rules and conventions.

Pragmatics involves the study of such conventions, especially as they impinge on discourse. Morgan and Green provide a general description of the territory covered by the term "pragmatics":

> The term *pragmatics* has come to be used not only for such relatively well-defined problems as the interpretation and use of deictic expressions but also for practically every communicative aspect of language use not analyzable as literal meaning, including certain types of inference, speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational implicature, and the relations and interactions among them. Pragmatics has even been used to refer to matters of politeness . . . and turn-taking. (1980, 113 - 114)

They go on to discuss pragmatics as the study of the pressures of context on the propositions of a particular sentence. They explore Grice's notion of "conversational implicature," a study of the ramifications of indirect meaning.

> These implicatures cannot be considered part of the literal meaning of sentences but, rather, are the result of inferences that hearers make (and that the speaker intends for the hearer to make) about the speaker's intentions in saying what he says. Interest in these issues has led to an increased concern on the part of linguists, philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, and others with matters of context, communication, and intention, so that now the term *pragmatics* is applied to studies of discourse structure, politeness and deference, and social interaction in conversation, as well as to more traditional concerns. What unites all these apparently disparate areas under the same term is the crucial role played in each by inference in context about the intention of the speaker. (1980, 116)

Mary Louise Pratt has made a thorough study of the transfer of conversational expectations, rules and contexts to the framework of a literary exchange between writer and reader. She dismisses the idea that literary language is special, self-reflective, or isolated from the norms of everyday social interaction and points to numerous conversational exchanges involving display, narrative, embellishment, use of tropes, and so forth. Literature, she says, is one category of display text.

Pratt quotes William Labov on the need for a display speech or text to have a point:

> There are many ways to tell the same story, to make very different points, or to make no point at all. Pointless stories are met (in English) with the withering rejoinder, "So what?" Every good narrator is continually warding off this question; when his narrative is over, it should be unthinkable for a bystander to say, "So what?" Instead, the appropriate remark would be "He did?" or similar means of registering the reportable character of the events of the narrative. (quoted in Pratt 1977, 47)

According to Pratt, reader and writer set up an agreement which works on the cooperative principle which governs normal conversations. The reader agrees to read the text on the assumption that the writer has reasons for writing as he or she does. The unmarked or most normal method of telling a story is to set up enough information to make all clear from the outset. When a writer launches into the heart of a story without making the setting clear (the *in medias res* opening), however, the reader supplies the assumption that more will be made clear as the text progresses.

Pratt dismisses the argument that all the information we need to supply the context of the text will be inscribed within it. In their famous essay on the intentional fallacy, Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art." (1954, 3)

Apart from other problems, they pointed out,

> One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem--for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem. (1954, 4)

Roland Barthes, in *Image Music Text*, put forward a similar perspective:

> As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. (1984, 142)

Pratt, however, refers to more general and more institutional conditions than mere specific personal intention. She makes a further important point about the importance of including the social context in any analysis of a text, spoken or written:

> In sum, speech act theory provides a way of talking about utterances not only in terms of their surface grammatical properties but also in terms of the context in which they are made, the intentions, attitudes, and expectations of the participants, the relationships existing between participants, and generally the unspoken rules and conventions that are understood to be in play when an utterance is made and received. (1977, 86)

The writer's intention to tell a story and establish it as worth the telling must surely be considered as part of the social framing of the act of reading.

Speech act theory accounts for numerous social conventions in ordinary conversation. In special circumstances, some rules are suspended. For example, the right to take turns is put in abeyance when someone has a story or a joke to tell, and an increased obligation is then put on the speaker to make it worth the listeners' while since they have sacrificed their right to take regular turns. It is not a very great leap to see a similar role of voluntary audience belonging to the readers of a story, and a similar obligation placed on the author to make it worthwhile. In the case of a published story, we make further assumptions. Pratt says:

> It seems to me that one of the most important things we know when we know an utterance to be a work of literature is the fact that it got published and that most likely it was intended to be. A number of important reader assumptions follow from this fact. Unless otherwise indicated, readers of modern published works assume that the text was composed in writing and that it is definitive. This means, among other things, that its author had more time to plan and prepare his utterance than conversation allows and that he also had (and probably used) the opportunity to correct and improve on his utterance before delivering it over to the Audience. We are entitled to assume, then, that this text is free of gross randomness and errors and that it is, in its author's eyes, if not the best possible version of itself at least a satisfactory version, which the author has chosen to give us having had the chance to deliberate. If an author has not had this chance to correct, deliberate and choose his version--if, for example, he dies and a manuscript is published without his final approval--this fact *must* be made known to the Audience at the outset of the text, and we adjust our expectations and responses accordingly. In approaching literary works, and printed discourse in general, I think we normally assume that this opportunity for deliberation makes it more likely that this utterance will be "worth it" to us. It is partly for this reason that written compositions can make exceptional demands on their Audiences: they can be longer and more difficult to decipher than spontaneous, spoken discourse, especially if intended to be read rather than heard. (1977, 116 - 117)

The publishers, reviewers and other gatekeepers also affect our expectations.

> A work which has been ratified by a prestigious publishing house or journal is assumed to have won a keener competition over a wider field than a work published on a small scale. Data such as these play a significant role in conditioning our choice of what to read and our expectations of what we do read, though they are in most cases secondary in importance to the data about the book's genre, subgenre, and subject matter that we glean from the title page. These types of data--both typological and evaluative--are designed to bring together literary works and their intended Audiences, that is (in most cases), the Audiences most likely to appreciate them. They are important data, because, unlike the Audience for the natural narrator, the Audience for an author is both undefined and expandable. (1977, 119)

This kind of social information which we bring to a text is not the kind of explicit guessing-game about the author's personal intentions which Wimsatt and Beardsley frowned on, but at the same time it is information beyond the simple words on the page which, to them, represented the outer limits of exploration. Pratt goes further, and suggests that the relationship between teller and audience in a printed story is so strong that the cooperative principle between them is "hyperprotected." (215) This gives the fictional speaker licence to break rules which in a natural conversation would be considered as intolerable deviance.

Pratt's analysis ties in with Peter Rabinowitz's (1987) rules of coherence which suggest that in nineteenth and twentieth century Western literature we are conditioned to interpret the entirety of a text in such a way that gaps are filled and surpluses explained. Andrew Stibbs goes further and says that readers may even take their part in the contract so seriously that they make up for deficiencies in the text.

> Once an awareness of tropes is abroad, it can run riot. Ingenious readers can find a tropic significance in any old detail. . . . This propensity in readers could be useful to authors who have difficulty finishing off a tale so that a sense of ending is satisfied: describe a scene or the weather at the end and the reader will surely interpret it as a satisfying metonym or metaphor for all that has gone before--or for the new state of equilibrium to which the plot has brought its characters and motifs--or for the implied future on the threshold of which the characters stand. . . . With literature we are all superstitious. (1991, 69)

Many twentieth-century Western readers may feel a strong urge to tuck in the loose ends and find referents for every signifier. However, this is still a culturally conditioned response to narrative and not necessarily a simple human instinct. Iser, in fact, describes modern texts as attempting to disrupt the complacency that may attend too complete a closure.

> Consistency-building is quite a different matter. As a structure of comprehension it depends on the reader and not on the work, and as such it is inextricably bound up with subjective factors and above all, the habitual orientations of the reader. This is why modern literary works are so full of apparent inconsistencies--not because they are badly constructed, but because such breaks act as hindrances to comprehension, and so force us to reject our habitual orientations as inadequate. If one tries to ignore such breaks, or to condemn them as faults in accordance with classical norms, one is in fact attempting to rob them of their function. The frequency with which such attempts are made can be gauged merely from the number of interpretations bearing the title: *A Reader's Guide to*. . . (1978, 18, ellipsis in original)

The contract of cooperation between reader and writer can not only compensate for deficiencies; it can also allow the writer to strain at the very limits of this cooperation. Pratt says,

> Deviance occurs in literature primarily because the literary context is one that has the necessary guarantees we need in order to let deviance happen. . . . [I]t is no accident that verbal jeopardy has become the novelist's favorite game in the last thirty or forty years. The drastic deviance which we encounter in the new novel amounts to a declaration of war on the unmarked narrative and literary norms the novel presupposes and on the interpretation of experience which those norms have been used to affirm in our culture. . . . Probably the one thing the new novelists share is a conviction that the unmarked speech situation for the novel is incompatible with their own view of contemporary experience. (1977, 221 - 223)

In looking at the social arrangements that govern discourse in particular settings, we may usefully consider the question of the community of interpreters. As Stanley Fish puts it,

> [T]he conclusion, therefore, is that all objects are made and not found, and that they are made by the interpretive strategies we set in motion. This does not, however, commit me to subjectivity because the means by which they are made are social and conventional. That is, the "you" who does the interpretative work that puts poems and assignments and lists into the world is a communal you and not an isolated individual. . . . [W]e do *not* have free-standing readers in a relationship of perceptual adequacy or inadequacy to an equally free-standing text. Rather, we have readers whose consciousnesses are constituted by a set of conventional notions which when put into operation constitute in turn a conventional, and conventionally seen, object. (1980, 331 - 332)

As readers we are prepared to grant the author a certain licence to attract and keep our attention through the story. However, it seems likely that our attitude towards the story will also be conditioned by our perception of the community of interpreters to which we belong for the purposes of reading this particular text; this community need not be a fixed one. When I read a children's text as an adult "expert," I read it very differently from the way I read the same book aloud to my children.

Pragmatics and deixis

Jerry Palmer, in his synthesis of many complex theories about film and narrative, offers an analysis of one way in which conventions and processes are embodied in practice. His argument deals with the way in which the pragmatic relationship between writer and reader is encoded in text. He is addressing the question of deictics, or shifters--those elements of language which are meaningful only in a specific context: personal pronouns, certain adverbs such as *now*, *yesterday*, *here*. Similarly, tense systems can function as shifters.

> The difference between "I saw him" and "I have seen him", for example, lies not in the time in question (since both could easily refer to the same moment in time), but to a difference in the relationship between then and the moment of speaking. (1991, 70)

Shifters can be defined in abstract terms, so that the dictionary entry for "I" reads something like "the one who is speaking." They are fully part of the language system at this level. Nevertheless, they only truly have meaning in context.

> [T]heir meaning is significantly and fundamentally different from the meanings of nouns and verbs, in the sense that the meaning of nouns and verbs can be established on the basis that they classify objects and events into categories . . . independently of the application of such words in the flow of actual spoken or written language. Shifters' definitions, on the other hand, are empty spaces which can only be filled when the words are used in actual speech or writing. . . .
>
> These examples should be taken as brief indications of a general point: that there exists a dimension of meaning which is not reducible to language

> considered as a system ("langue" or "competence"), and yet which is not the arena of the free spontaneous combination of units from the language system by a speaking subject--who would thus be the unconstrained "author" of his or her own speech--since it is clear that (for example) the use of both pronouns and tenses is rule-bound. (1991, 70 - 71)

Deictics, therefore, function at the level of convention and process, in that they are rule-bound and learnable--and yet, they can only fully function in practice. Furthermore, by definition, they must include an essential element of understanding some involvement of a virtual other who fills the deictic spaces differently.

Just as three-year-olds can produce fully-fledged event schemata, very small children indeed show that they have some grasp of the principle of deictic shifting. Jerome Bruner dates that understanding as early as the age of one.

> We found that by their first birthday children are already adept at following another's line of regard to search for an object that is engaging their partner's attention. That surely requires a sophisticated conception of a partner's mind.
>
> Yet why should we have been surprised? The child has such conceptions "in mind" in approaching language. Children show virtually no difficulty in mastering pronouns and certain demonstratives, for example, even though these constitute that confusing class of referring expressions called deictic shifters. . . . The shifter ought to be hard to solve for the child, and yet it isn't. (1986, 60)

Margaret Meek, looking at the ways in which children come to terms with time past, another deictic territory, also refers to the ease with which very young children grasp an essential understanding. She quotes Carol Fox's work with Josh, who at five years nine months was telling very elaborate narratives with an extensive range and control of time past.

> Children build the author's or teller's story time into their stories, and thereby gain an extended "virtual past" from fictive as well as factual narration. . . .
>
> Children's memories are necessarily short over actual time but . . . the poetic structure of Josh's making allows him to combine the intricacies of genuine, and necessarily recent, memory with "the artistic devices that achieve its semblance". In response to the invitation, "tell me a story", Josh is learning the play of the text, the play of shifters. (1984, 208)

Meek goes on to more elaborate discussion of the place of time in stories, but at this point I am more interested in the role of shifters in the *placement* of a story within both a conventional and a social world: they are the pivot point which render the text able to move between abstract and concrete, between potential and actual, between you the teller and me the reader. Through the deictics, the writer speaks thus to the reader: my position in the grammatical spaces left open by these deictic shifters is of equal weight to yours. I created these spaces within my context; you fill them within yours. The deictics have their essential meaning in the fact that both writer and reader know that this equivalence is at work in the text. Neither writer nor reader is the same as the "I" in the text, but in their relationship to that "I" lies at least one aspect of their relationship to one another as virtual other.

Personal pronouns can be peripheral or implied within a narrative text. In many ways, the real deictic work is done by the verbs. A verb cannot be couched in terms which do not create some kind of relationship between teller and listener/reader because a verb must always be conveyed in one tense or another. Kaplan, in his *English Grammar*, defines tense thus: "Tense is the grammatical expression of the time relation between two events or situations." (1989, 174)

One of these two events is the moment of telling; it cannot be subtracted from the verb. A verb contains within it a relationship between what is spoken of and the time of speaking. This is inherent in any text built on verbs, and certainly in any narrative text.

An example may help to make this clearer. It comes from a deceptively simple text, *Little House in the Big Woods*, by Laura Ingalls Wilder. The opening sentence reads as follows: "Once upon a time, sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs." (1932/71, 1)

There are three deictic references in this text: "once," "ago," and "lived." "Once" means "not now," "ago" means "before this time of speaking," and "lived" also includes the meaning "not now, in the past." The effect of the sentence is more complex than that, however, because of the precision of the word "sixty." It is now more than "sixty years ago" that Laura Ingalls Wilder *published* this sentence; *Little House in the Big Woods* first appeared in 1932. The "sixty" can be germane only to the moment of the writing, not to the moment of the reading. However, as readers, we mark this as a deviation from what we normally expect; in the case of this text, we must make allowances for the discrepancy between writing and reading. The abnormality of this procedure sheds some small light on the way we normally process an unproblematic sentence.

Wolf also starts with a sentence with more than one point of verbal shifting: "*Of course Cassy never dreams*, Nan always said." (1990/92, 2) Here Nan's own words are naturally in the present tense. However, Nan is not necessarily saying these words at any particular point in the narrative. "Always said" has its own specificity. We know she said it more than once; "always" is one way of creating a habitual or iterative verb. "Always said" has a different specific meaning from "always says"; for whatever reason Nan does not appear to be still saying it at the point of our reading the narrative--though that wording would have been a possible alternative for the author. The sentence serves many predictive purposes for a reader, but it also has a strict locational effect: in effect, a sign saying YOU ARE HERE in relation to this story; although Nan said this many times, it was in the past in relationship to the moment of telling and of reading.

Such a placement is an essential part of getting a story going and cannot be deleted from any text, though different languages accomplish such locative work by different means.

The writer cannot escape from the text, not because there is nothing outside the text but because the writer is *written into* the text. This is not accomplished by anything so clumsy as an automatic association between the author and the "I" in the text; it works because the very appearance of deictics assumes a reciprocity between teller and told, between one human shifter and another, between the two essential participants in the deictic past tense of the told story. The writer may not have "intended" some of the effects of a work, but intention is built into selection of verb forms and cannot be subtracted. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) tells us that learning is dialogic; speech act theory tells us that language functions on a level of reciprocity. Deictic shifters and tense forms give us one window on that process in action. And in that reciprocity we see the teller and the audience also pivoting between practice and convention, each of which feeds the other.

At some point, the learning reader must come to terms with this complexity. The deictic relationship with the writer is inscribed in the words on the page, and is a part of both what readers experience and what readers do. Simply learning to recognize print will not be sufficient to establish the kind of mental alignment with the words which reading requires.

The fixed text and the developing reader

The question of deixis turns us towards the issues raised by the text. Writers inscribe themselves within the text; readers insert themselves. The text, however, once fixed (often but not necessarily in print) does not appear to alter in the face of such activity.

We have looked in some detail at the behaviour of the reader and have paid considerably less attention to the role of the text. The text, however, is at least an equal partner in the reading experience, and we need to consider what it offers, and, equally important, how we describe what it offers.

In a world of singular practices, accreted and shifting conventions, and processes that work more successfully on one occasion than another, the text would appear to be the one fixed point in any study of reading. The words helpfully stay in the same order on the page, no matter what else alters. Where does the idea of the text fit within the dichotomy between the singular and the abstract? Any discourse practice is resolutely singular; the text, however, remains fixed from one reading to another and offers plural potential to any reader who picks it up.

Nevertheless, the text must be classified as an example of a discourse *practice* if our terminology is to remain coherent. The text appears to be a constant, but in fact it is simply the record of a singular process: the writing of it. Each word represents a decision by the author. "Stories are written on purpose," as James R. Meehan puts it (1982, 459). Even the oldest oral stories survive in one version or another because someone made decisions along the way. The words may reverberate in ways not intended by the author, but their presence and juxtaposition are not accidental. The text is not simply a given that can be put to one side in the interest of concentrating on the singular decisions that are made in any discourse practice, any particular reading. In some ways, the relative permanence of the text disguises its specific origins in the inevitable welter of plural readings; but it is not an abstract in itself, nor is it simply a collection of conventions.

Once we put the creation of the text and the reading of the text on the same level of singularity, it becomes easier to consider the relationship between the writer and the reader. Even if we resist the lure of the intentional fallacy, a certain level of communication between the two must exist for a reading to take place at all--and this understanding perhaps is what moves us back to the level of convention and process. The writing precedes the reading, but writer and reader each must simulate the idea of the other in order to proceed at all. Like all other language, the written word, in Bakhtin's term, "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's." (1981, 293)

When we talk about the actual practice of writing or reading a story, many assumptions and schemata operate on an inchoate level and are seldom articulated. However, there seems to me to be little doubt that one element inscribed in either a writing or a reading act is a recognition of a virtual other. No matter how much we try to talk about nothing existing outside of the text or outside of language, these implicit recognitions of the influence of another's mind are built into the text itself by the way our language and our narrative powers of organization work, and it would be futile to try to avoid them. The awareness of the linguistic other both is built into the language structure of the text and, at the same time, forces an implicit acknowledgement of a being *behind* the text, as it were.

The poet, James Dickey, has described this acknowledgement from the writer's perspective:

> I don't really believe what literary critics have believed from the beginning of time: that poetry is an attempt of the poet to create or recreate his own experience and to pass it on. I don't believe in that. I believe it's an awakening of the sensibilities of someone else, the stranger. (1987, 105)

Charles Taylor has described this phenomenon in a sentence that is elegantly succinct: "The very form of a work of art shows its character as *addressed*." (1991, 35)

Kendall Walton agrees that a particular pragmatic use of language is what defines fiction.

> Some verbal texts are fiction and some are not. So *description* and *depiction*--the alliteration notwithstanding--are not parallel concepts. One is a species of fiction, the other cuts across that category. "Description" ("words," "verbal symbols") is to be defined in semantic and/or syntactic terms, I suppose; depiction is a pragmatic notion, a matter of the use to which things with semantic content are to be put.
>
> There is good reason to recognize this pragmatic category and to give it a central place in our view of things. (1990, 351)

Elsewhere, Walton defines the pragmatic use of language in fiction: "Fictionality is not *defined* by the principles of generation; it consists rather in prescriptions to imagine." (1990, 185)

The issue of the virtual other in text is not confined to narrative or lyrical examples. Clifford Geertz, discussing the anthropologist as writer, makes a remarkably similar point:

> [T]wo questions, or perhaps the same one doubly asked, immediately pose themselves: (1) How is the "author-function" (or shall we, so long as we are going to be literary about the matter, just say "the author") made manifest in the text? (2) Just what is it--beyond the obvious tautology, "a work"--that the author authors? The first question, call it that of signature, is a matter of the construction of a writerly identity. The second, call it that of discourse, is a matter of developing a way of putting things--a vocabulary, a rhetoric, a pattern of argument--that is connected to that identity in such a way that it seems to come from it as a remark from a mind. (1988, 8 - 9)

The analysis of deictics gives one technical way to describe how the addressing of a text can work. However, learning readers must come to terms with the implications of the relationship between the implied author and the implied reader without the benefit of explicit grammatical vocabulary. Their understanding will be unarticulated, but it is possible to trace its growth.

It seems likely that this concept of the virtual other may be developed implicitly, as part of the script of reading, long before any such idea becomes explicit (if it ever does). Paul Light discusses this process in his account of a child's general development of the concept of the other. According to his description, acknowledgement of the other first manifests itself in behaviour.

> [D]evelopmentally, scripts may also provide an avenue into social behaviour which is relatively independent of sophisticated role-taking. Much social knowledge may be implicit in the scripted interaction without the child yet having appropriated that knowledge of himself. The development of explicit role-taking inferences may thus be envisaged as a gradual process of abstracting from patterns of interaction in which the child is already actively engaged. (1987, 56)

The script is like a meeting-place between convention, process, and practice. At first it governs practice, then with repetition it provides more schematic cues for process, and allows a framework for the establishment of conventions. The whole process is circular, of course, because the script has already been abstracted from earlier practice.

According to Jerome Bruner, one of the chief assets of the learning child is an essential ability to compose ideas through some form of mediation, either with others or with some kind of vicarious experience. If, as he says, "most of our approaches to the world are mediated through negotiation with others," (1986, 68) it is no wonder that we learn to make deictic shifts at such an early stage. He continues, "We know far too little about learning from vicarious experience, from interaction, from media, even from tutors." (1986, 68) It seems plausible to argue that we are back to the importance of scripts, which from very early in the child's life, represent a kind of conventional mediation of our instinctive behaviour.

Bruner comments on the ability of one-year-olds to adopt another's perspective, to pass beyond egocentrism.

> [W]hen the child understands the event structure in which he is operating he is not that different from an adult. He simply does not have as grand a collection of scripts and scenarios and event schemas as adults do. The child's

> mastery of deictic shifters suggests, moreover, that egocentrism per se is not the problem. It is when the child fails to grasp the structure of events that he adopts an egocentric framework. The problem is not with competence but with performance. It is not that the child does not have the capacity to take another's perspective, but rather that he cannot do so without understanding the situation in which he is operating. (1986, 68)]

Thus we see the child in the process of learning to read. He or she takes account of the entire social situation, behaves according to a scripted understanding of appropriateness, assumes postures which incorporate a relationship to the text which may not yet have developed in its own right, and assimilates ideas which may go to refine the relevant scripts and schemata.

In reading, as in other activities, the child learns first how to behave and gradually builds up a more specialised repertoire to explain how a reader makes sense of a text. It is highly unlikely that the child will ever get to the point of consciously theorising about the virtual other inherent in the text, but as he or she lines up behaviour to be able to react to this virtual other, the understanding grows and refines the template for further actions.

It seems plausible that, in the early stages, a real "other" reinforces the role of the virtual other inscribed in the text. Marilyn Cochran-Smith, describing an adult reading to a nursery class, gives us one example of the transition from behaviour to understanding. Children learn to sit "on the rug" in the class she describes, they learn ways of listening to and trusting the reader. In return, the reader makes many conventions explicit to the small listeners.

> To help them make sense of texts, the storyreader guided the listeners to take on the characteristics of the readers implied in particular books. To shape real reader/listeners into implied readers, or whenever a mismatch between the two seemed to occur, she overrode the textual narrator and became the narrator herself, annotating the text and trying to establish some sort of agreement between real and implied readers. The storyreader mediated by alternating between two roles--spokesperson for the text and secondary narrator or commentator on the text. (1984, 177)

Vygotsky describes in more general terms how children assimilate and make sense of the understandings implicit in various forms of scripted behaviour:

> *[H]uman learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them. . . .*
>
> Language arises initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in his environment. Only subsequently, upon conversion to internal speech, does it come to organize the child's thought, that is, become an internal mental function. (1978, 88 - 89)

So the child, learning about stories, gradually internalises the notion that a virtual other is speaking through a text, invoking a virtual reader of which the child is the present exemplar. What might this reciprocal simulation involve? The question of tellability probably heads the list. The writer considers ways to persuade the reader that the story is worth the effort of reading it; the reader sets out to ascertain whether the writer is offering a fair bargain. Broad issues of genre probably feature at this level as well; the writer must assume certain kinds of knowledge on the part of the reader; the reader must assume that the writer knows the rules and will only break them on purpose. These are complex issues which go well beyond the bottom line of decoding, but which are crucial to the child's development of a sense of the purpose of reading.

Increasing complexity in development

In addition to this deep understanding of narrative, the child must learn to master conventions of printed text as well; not just the phonics but the whole way a book works. Margaret Meek has described Ben reading *Rosie's Walk* and paid specific attention to some of the competencies he must acquire.

> When we open the page at the first two-page spread Rosie is in her coop at the left-hand side--where the reader's eyes naturally go if books aren't an entire novelty. Beyond her, on the right-hand page, is the farm, now with more buildings, and beyond it a cornfield, a distant goat, a tractor, a cart and beehives. There is no sign of the fox. The print on this page is *Pat Hutchins, ROSIE'S WALK, The Bodley Head, London, Sydney, Toronto.* Most accomplished readers turn this page, taking the conventions of publishing for granted. My clever student read the words out and we talked about where books are made. Ben said this was the third time he'd seen the title; he recognized it. Explaining Pat Hutchins took a little longer but the first-edition hardback has her picture on the back flap. That someone wrote the story and drew the pictures was a new idea for Ben; he wondered if he could see her. We said he might, for she too lived in London. As this wasn't an instructional situation in his eyes he knew he could tell us to turn the page, which we did and found the same words again, this time in tiny print with the publisher's address and the date. When did you learn that you don't read these words as part of the story?
>
> On the facing page we next read: "For Wendy and Stephen". Here Ben was quickly alerted. "I know that says Wendy," he said. "Her peg is next to mine. And I know Stephen, that's his name." So we embedded this successful recognition (called "world to text" by the experts) in the idea that authors and artists make books for children they know, but other children can read them.
>
> If you are already bored by these details you might want to stop here, but not before I suggest that understanding authorship, audience, illustration and iconic interpretation are part of the ontogenesis of "literary competencies". To learn to read a book, as distinct from simply recognizing the words on the page, a young reader has to become both the teller (picking up the author's view and voice) and the told (the recipient of the story, the interpreter). This symbolic interaction is learned early. It is rarely, if ever, taught, except in so far as an adult stands in for the author by giving the text a "voice" when reading to the child." (1988, 9 - 10)

Learning does not stop, of course, when the reader cracks the decoding system or masters the book format. Up to now, however, it has been possible to make some general points about learning to read; the main institution under consideration has been the printed text. In Western societies, as children come to the age where most of them will learn to read, a second and very powerful institution must be taken into consideration: school.

This is not the place to go into the substantial differences between the achievement of simple literacy and the achievement of being schooled. Many writers have tackled that subject. David Barton provides a useful overview of much of their work. For our purposes, he does something equally helpful: he casts the question of schooled literacy into relief by the process of making it strange.

> In examining reading and writing it is important to remember that schooled literacy is not the only form of literacy going on in schools. These are other literacies which are rendered invisible. We need to look at actual practices. There is a range of literacy activities, both official and unofficial. In the classroom there is graffiti and doodling, names are carved on desks, secret notes are passed. Children read comics, and circulate illicit material, they have their own books and magazines brought in from the outside. In addition, the visual environment of notice-boards, classroom displays and signs surround children. Children have their names on their clothes and lunch boxes. The young child takes written messages between home and school; here, the child acts as a carrier of messages, which, incidentally, also have to be explained orally. The child observes literacy events which are not part of the official teaching of reading and writing; for example, they may participate in the daily taking of the register and see other aspects of school record-keeping. As children get older they continue to do their own reading and writing both inside and outside of school.
>
> The official teaching within schools has its own set of practices. Just as there are special books for learning to read at home, so there are special books used throughout schooling. Often these belong in the school and are not removed from the classrooms. There are often many copies of the same book, they may not be available in book shops. They may be lent to children for a length of time; the children take responsibility for them and keep them in school--parents may never see them. Sometimes children get their own book, sometimes they share them. Textbooks are a distinct genre, a particular form of writing. Initially such books are used for learning to read, and thereafter they are used to learn particular discourses which have been compartmentalized as distinct subjects, with specialist teachers. Often these books have been written by teachers, although many of them give the impression of not having an author. The way they are used is special in that often they are read in very short sections; there is a great deal of talk around these texts and their use is strongly mediated by the teachers. (1994, 179 - 180)

I quote Barton at length because he provides a helpful example of what we can find out when we focus on actual *practices*--and also because he offers a shorthand account of a very complex process that I do not intend to explore in detail at this point. Children develop school practices in fiction reading as well as in other subjects. Some children augment these mediated practices with their own private reading activity; others do not. In any case, what schooling offers to the developing reader is not accidental or intrinsically organic, even though, as Barton describes, many of the activities which go on in classrooms are not planned by the teacher. As Scribner and Cole (1981) have suggested, it is extremely difficult to disentangle the effects of literacy on the developing mind from the effects of schooling *per se*. In any case, we are talking about a complex, socially organized process which has substantial consequences on any reader, some intended by the organizers of the system, some developed as a consequence of the social arrangements of the classroom system, some inadvertent, resistant, defensive or serendipitous developments on the part of the individual student. Ways of reading are taught, and some are learned. It is possibly imaginable that a free-floating reader might develop absolutely outside the institutional constraints of any form of structured schooling, but the reality is that the overwhelming majority of readers have received coaching in the *mores* of one institutional system or many.

By the time they are adolescents, readers have gained a great deal of experience, schooled and otherwise, in dealing with print. Some fascinating work has explored the literary reading activities of such older readers. The reports of this research gives us some new filters through which to look at the reading behaviour of adolescents, at least in developed Western societies.

Jack Thomson, after a major study of the reading habits and attitudes of 1007 students aged from 13 to 16 in Bathurst, Australia, drew up a developmental model of response to literature which involves six stages. He describes these in the following terms. The first stage is an unreflective interest in action, and he suggests this involves rudimentary mental images (stereotypes from film and television) and prediction of what might happen next in the short term. The second stage is empathising and he suggests the strategies involved in this stage are mental images of affect and expectations about characters. The third stage is analogising which he says involves drawing on the repertoire of personal experiences and making connections between characters and one's own life. The fourth stage is reflecting on the significance of events (theme) and behaviour (distanced evaluation of characters). Under this heading he includes such behaviour as the generation of expectations about alternative possible long-term outcomes, the interrogation of the text and the filling of gaps, and the formulation of puzzles and enigmas, the acceptance of hermeneutic challenges. The fifth stage involves the review of the whole work as the author's creation and Thomson says this involves drawing on literary and cultural repertoires, interrogating the text to match the author's representation with one's own, and recognizing the implied author. The sixth and final stage involves a consciously considered relationship with the author, the recognition of textual ideology, and the understanding of self (what he calls an identity theme) and of one's own reading processes. Under this category he includes the recognition of the implied reader in the text and a quality of reflexiveness. (1987, 360 - 361) All of these stages can involve a range of intensity of interest and a range of sophistication of response.

Robert Protherough, reporting on work with adolescents in Hull, England, has come up with a similar sort of developmental list. He describes five modes of reading. The first is projection into a character; readers "put themselves" in the character's place and lose themselves in the story. The second is projection into the situation:

> Many readers describe the experience as being "there" in the book with the characters, but not as identifying with any one of them. They see themselves as spectators on the outskirts or margin of events, emotionally involved but unable to affect the action. They often perceive themselves as "close" to the characters, their "friend". (1983, 22)

The third mode is associating between book and reader. Readers are not quite so immersed in the story, but rather are concerned to make links between their own real experiences and the experiences of the characters and situations in the book.

> The movement is in both directions: they visualize the book in terms of their own world, and they imagine how they would feel and act if they were people in the story. . . . In other words, readers may realize the secondary world of the book by importing into it elements from their first-hand experience, or they may use the book as a testing-ground for their own feelings and ideas, or indeed both. (1983, 23)

The fourth mode is that of the distanced viewer. Now readers feel as if they are watching from afar.

> The reader is firmly outside the action, but emotionally involved in what happens and wishing to be able to influence the outcome. . . . Within this view of reading they may express feelings of empathy or a more distanced awareness of what "ought" to be happening. (1983, 24)

Finally, mode five is one of detached evaluation. Protherough says this kind of reading was rarely mentioned by younger pupils and suggests that this is a more schooled response, one that grows out of literary studies. He also suggests that this may be more of a post-reading approach:

> One boy was aware of the difference between the ways in which he responded while actually reading a novel and at the end of the process, looking back. He saw the more detached mode as essentially retrospective. While reading, the characters "are part of you and you of them in the action, and as you are reading you want to help them and live for real the life the character has. Afterwards one thinks more carefully and considers what the character considered. . . . " (boy 15) (1983, 25, ellipsis in original)

Protherough makes an important point which Thomson would also support:

> What does seem to be associated with maturity in reading is the ability to operate in an increasing number of modes, according to the work being read and mood or needs of the moment, rather than assuming that there is only one way of reading. . . . In this respect, "progress" in reading might be defined as the increasing ability to match modes of reading to the material being read. (1983, 21)

Elise Earthman made a substantial study of yet older readers, exploring differences in approaches between freshman college students in a general English class, and graduate English specialists. She used Iser's vocabulary of gaps and repertoires and, using specific common texts, produced an analysis which in some ways is more fine-grained than either Thomson's or Protherough's.

Earthman was particularly interested in the transaction between a particular reader and a particular text.

> Using a framework from Iser (1978) and Rosenblatt (1978), I devoted particular attention to three categories of activity drawn from their theories:

> 1) gap-filling, 2) use of the text's repertoire, and 3) the reader's assumption of multiple perspectives or multiple levels of association during the reading. My goal was to show the ways in which the attribute of less-experienced versus more-experienced reader shapes the literary transaction between reader and text. (1992, 355)

Earthman found characteristic differences between the approaches of the graduate students and the approaches of the freshmen.

> Certain plot and character gaps which require inferences well supported by the text were made by freshmen and graduate students alike, but freshmen sometimes detected but failed to work with gaps which appeared to be difficult to fill. Often in such places, freshmen expressed confusion or lack of understanding but would not take steps to eliminate their confusion; freshmen typically responded, "Oh well," and moved on. Freshmen tended to miss particular types of gaps that graduate students found highly relevant, especially those involving imagery or symbolism, and from which graduate students derived insights that greatly enriched their understanding of a work.
>
> Freshmen generally did not make use of much of a text's repertoire (those elements that connect a work to a real-world time and place and often to other works of literature) . . . . Graduate students made great use of a text's repertoire, and their attention to determining the significance of the text's various elements allowed them to move more deeply into the work and its implications.
>
> Also graduate students were able to assume perspectives in a variety of ways while reading a work, again leading them to a fuller realization of a text's potentialities. Freshmen seemed to read a text in a very "closed" manner; they were unwilling or unable to find the various levels of association in a story or poem, to disengage themselves from a narrator's perspective, and to work with a text's irony and ambiguities. They appeared to view the ability to see a text from another angle as not an enrichment but a loss and remained reluctant to relinquish an initial understanding for another alternative. Thus they were not likely to revise their understanding in significant ways during the course of their transaction with a work. (1992, 381)

Like Protherough, Earthman finds a linkage between maturity in reading and a more supple and flexible approach to dealing with different kinds of text. She pays more attention to the need to make shifts *within* the reading of one particular text. This point is an important one which needs further clarification.

The implied reader

The deictic relationship within the text can be described as the relationship between the implied author and the implied reader. The implied reader is a textual construct, another plane of interface between practice and convention. Seymour Chatman describes the implied reader as "not the flesh-and-bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book, but the audience presupposed by the narrative itself." (1978, 149 - 150)

The conventional arrangements which construct an implied reader make an entry route into the text for the real reader, at least part of whose job is to establish how the implied reader is meant to respond, even if the real reader resists that response.

The implied reader, by some accounts, is so much a construct of the text itself that the author might seem to have some control at least over the "reading" supplied by this imaginary figment. Another argument suggests that at least in a preliminary reading of a text, a real reader searches to find ways to align him or herself with the implied reader. The question of how obediently a real reader can or should identify with the implied reader is an important one, and one that requires exploration.

In the terms we have been using to this point, the interface between practice and convention is a crucial one; we cannot get beyond it. We use conventions to shape our practice, but no practice can be reduced to a paradigmatic exercise of conventions. Furthermore, the relationship between the conventional expectations and the actual behaviour of the reader must be a dynamic one. In the early stages of reading a book, the reader is trying to establish which conventions most usefully apply. The implied reader "knows" how to read the book from the first page onwards, but real readers change strategies even as they process the text. This is one of the major consequences of the temporal nature of reading; the implied reader is inscribed in the text and to some extent therefore complete; the real reader works in a world of partialities until the reading is finished and perhaps even after.

To explore the complicated relationship which develops as readers connect with/align themselves with/learn from/resist/ disagree with the implied reader is to take on one of the major conundrums of reading. The words of the text are set in a fixed order. Every reader, on every reading occasion, works out a relationship with that text which includes the operation of inferring the role of the implied reader. In so far as the implied reader exists as an inference of each reader, it is always singular. As with the simpler deictic relationships, the reader is forced to simulate the author's intentions.

The importance of the dynamic and shifting relationship between real and implied reader is one that has temporal implications, which are not always addressed by those theorists who tackle the whole question. Our reading of the early stages of a text involves the attempt to work out what practices will actually be most useful. Recently, I found I was almost halfway through a book before I suddenly noticed the structural and strategic use of metaphors in the organization of the story. I would now, of course, re-read the first section of that book quite differently. This kind of development seems to me to be a legitimate element of the reading process, but it is not one that is always given due attention in discussions of the role of the implied reader. The implied reader, on some accounts, knows from page one that metaphors are going to be deployed in a particular way; in this case, I, as the real reader, was slow to catch on. I readily acknowledge that I missed something in the first part of that book--but I am always going to miss *something*; only the implied reader has everything under control from the outset.

The following consideration of the relationship between the text, the implied reader inscribed in that text, and the real reader, involves some extended quotations and elaborate argument. It seems to me to be important because questions of temporal process are vital to this study. Do we read most satisfactorily when we behave like the implied reader? What happens while you deduce how the implied reader should behave? Does our reading become more satisfactory as we progress through the text and gain some insight into the implied reader's role?

There are related questions. Do we need to align ourselves with the implied reader before we can begin to marshall our points of disagreement or resistance? Can we do justice to a text while resisting the implied reader? Different writers have different suggestions.

Peter Rabinowitz talks about the implied reader (which he describes in terms of the authorial audience) in the following terms:

> This difference among readers has always posed a problem for writers, one that has grown with increased literacy and the correspondingly increased heterogeneity of the reading public. An author has, in most cases, no firm knowledge of the actual readers who will pick up his or her book. Yet he or she cannot begin to fill up a blank page without making assumptions about the readers' beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with conventions. As a result, authors are forced to guess; they design their books rhetorically for some more or less specific *hypothetical* audience, which I call the *authorial audience*. Artistic choices are based upon these assumptions--conscious or unconscious--about readers, and to a certain extent, artistic success depends on their shrewdness, on the degree to which actual and authorial audience overlap. (1987, 21)

Rabinowitz goes on to argue that readers try to read as the author intended:

> The notion of the authorial audience is clearly tied to authorial intention, but it gets around some of the problems that have traditionally hampered the discussion of intention by treating it as a matter of social convention rather than of individual psychology. In other words, my perspective allows us to treat the reader's attempt to read as the author intended, not as a search for the author's private psyche, but rather as the joining of a particular social/interpretive community; that is, the acceptance of the author's invitation to read in a particular socially constituted way that is shared by the author and his or her expected readers. Indeed, authorial reading is not only a way of reading but, perhaps equally important, a way of talking about how you read--that is, the result of a community agreement that allows discussion of a certain sort to take place by treating meanings in a particular way (as found rather than made). (1987, 22)

Rabinowitz particularly looks at the importance of conventions in regulating that relationship between author and reader:

> Specifically, once he or she has made certain initial decisions, any writer who wishes to communicate--even if he or she wishes to communicate ambiguity--has limited the range of subsequent choices. Some of these limitations spring from what might be called brute facts. . . .
>
> More central to my argument, though, are *conventional* limitations on choice. There are no brute facts preventing an author from writing a religious parable in which a cross represented Judaism, but it would not

> communicate successfully. . . . The writer who wishes to be understood--even to be understood by a small group of readers--has to work within such conventional restraints.
>
> Despite these limitations, however, there is still an incalculable number of possible authorial audiences; and since the structure of a work is designed with the authorial audience in mind, actual readers *must* [my italics] come to share its characteristics as they read if they are to experience the text as the author wished. Reading as authorial audience, therefore involves a kind of distancing from the actual audience, from one's own immediate needs and interests. (1987, 23 - 25)

Rabinowitz is usually very sensitive to plurality, and it is unusual for him to use a prescriptive word such as "must" which appears in the second-last sentence of this extended quotation. Certainly there are those who would argue that there is no must about it. John Stephens, looking at questions of ideology, queries the virtues of reading as the author wishes you to do:

> [I]f you read a book and discover that it is utterly free of ideological presuppositions, what that really means is that you have just read a book which precisely reflects those societal presuppositions which you yourself have learned to subscribe to, and which are therefore invisible. (1992, 50)

Stephens develops this theme with regard to the question of the implied reader:

> As Iser (1974) formulated it, the implied reader is what an interpretative act will pivot on, in that it mediates the meaning which is a potentiality inherent in a text's structures and the (real) reader's actualization of this potential. The "implied" thus tends to blend into a notion of an "ideal" reader, the reader who will best actualize a book's potential meanings. . . . [T]he "best" reading, as envisaged by this process, occurs when the real reader is most closely aligned with the ideological position of the implied reader. In practice this does not always happen, and neither is it always desirable. There are also special problems posed by texts which set out to deny any stable centre of potential meaning, and hence imply a reader capable of multiple perspectives. (1992, 54 - 55)

Stephens raises an important qualification to the whole question of the reader submitting, or trying to submit, to the author's intention. Reed Way Dasenbrock looks at this problem from a different perspective, discussing the teaching of literature from different cultures:

> I think we should be able to see that current theories of interpretation fail to describe the classroom for just the same reason that they fail to describe the cross-cultural situation. These different schools presuppose that what is necessary for interpretation is a confident possession of the text, something we may have for works of Western culture but not for non-Western works, something our students may not have for any of the classics of our own cultural heritage. . . . I am interested in . . . questioning the logic of interpretive possession. . . . What I would encourage . . . is . . . the development of curiosity about--if not any "expert" knowledge of--other cultures, other peoples. If we are to do this, we must break with our assumption that the

> only proper place from which to apprehend a work of art is the position of possession, the position of the expert. What we need is a model of reading, of interpretation, which redescribes the scene of reading not as a scene of possession, of the demonstration of knowledge already in place, or as a failure of possession, but as a scene of learning. (1992, 38 - 39)

Dasenbrock's analysis allows for a more dynamic and temporal form of the implied reader, for the relationship between implied and real readers may change throughout the course of the text.

> The informed position is not always the position of the richest or most powerful experience of a work of art. And this becomes even more true when crossing cultural barriers: the unknown can be powerful precisely because it is unknown. But this is not to defend ignorance, to defend remaining unknowledgeable. For one can see something for the first time only once; after that, the choice is to become more knowledgeable, more expert, more informed, or to stay uninformed without the intense pleasure of initial acquaintance.
>
> Thus there is no real choice to be made between the initial uninformed response and the later expert one; the experience of art ideally leads one from the first to the second. *Knowledge does not come first and control the experience of the work of art; the experience of the work comes first and leads the experiencer towards knowledge.* Therefore it is not the expert reader who counts, but the reader willing to become expert, for only by becoming expert do we gain as well as lose in the process of gaining familiarity with art. (1992, 39 - 40, emphasis added)

In the italicised sentence above, Dasenbrock is making the same central point as I have made throughout this work: we establish our understanding of conventions and processes (what Dasenbrock here calls knowledge) through practice. We do not begin a book by assembling our repertoire of conventions and selecting the most useful; we begin by plunging into the story and establishing which conventions are going to work as we proceed.

When writers like Iser and Rabinowitz talk about a reader's grasp of conventions and processes, they tend all too often to speak of this grasp as something *already achieved*. How a learning reader develops such an understanding seems to be regarded as a separate question. Yet, except for those readers either re-reading or processing highly formulaic texts, nearly every reader is shifting and changing in relation to the role of the implied reader almost from page to page. The role of implied reader may indeed be an interface in the relationship between text and reader, between script and behaviour. But it must be an interface which allows for flexibility and suppleness because the real reader is changing and developing *because of* reading; the implied reader is inscribed in the text but not in any completely prescriptive or finite way.

The issue of the implied reader seems to me to be enriched by considerations of growth and learning. The relationship between the implied reader and any one real reader is a developing and dynamic one; any analysis that suggests the concept of a static implied reader fails to do justice to this aspect of reading.

Thomas G. Pavel deals with this distinction in somewhat more abstract terms. He is discussing the role of tightly or loosely defined conventions and takes as his example the embedded narrative of *Wuthering Heights.*

> [I]n order to play the game well, one has to be aware of the romantic technique of embedding a story difficult to believe into a first-person narrative told by a reliable individual. That this awareness has to be learned is not an obstacle to the argument, since, as with many games, we may start with a simple set of rules and gradually come to discover more and more complex strategies.
>
> The distinction between naive and more sophisticated reading becomes essential, therefore. In a game-theory perspective, literary texts are assumed to be built around a few basic rules that give access to the text; while a naive reader knows these and only these rules, more advanced strategies can gradually become available through training and practice. (1986, 57)

Pavel goes on to make a suggestion which is extremely useful for this study.

> The embedding of a core narrative into a frame narrative can be perceived by a naive reader as a surprising innovation, whose rules and reasons he has to uncover by carefully observing clues planted by the author. A reader ignorant of this particular game does not know whether the first frame of *Wuthering Heights* is meant only as a transition toward a more substantial account or if it is destined to become the main thread of action, to which, after the presentation of the manuscript, the story will return. A more sophisticated reader, *or the naive reader at a second reading*, will replace the strategies of discovery with the strategies of recognition. (1986, 58, emphasis added)

Whether one begins to read a text from a position of naivete or of sophistication has substantial tactical significance, as Bussis *et al.* observed of their beginning readers. They suggest that readers need to maintain a balance between momentum and accuracy, between anticipation and accountability to the text. This is partly the case because reading occurs over time.

> Another inherent demand follows from the fact that skill is an action. Because action is motion, it requires a certain degree of momentum to keep going; and the source of momentum in skill is anticipation. If a performer cannot figure out what resources are called for until they are actually needed, the performance necessarily stutters or breaks down altogether. The course of the action must be anticipated and needed resources triggered in advance if they are to be mobilized in time to maintain the flow of the action. Anticipation is therefore a cognitive demand of all skills. The degree to which a person satisfies this demand is manifest in the fluency of the performance. (1985, 67)

In their exploration of what leads to a more confident control over reading, they pay particular attention to the role of background knowledge as an essential element in fuelling the ongoing process of reading, which they define as an orchestration process involving the activation of many activities at once. They suggest that

> background knowledge is an essential catalyst of orchestration. Without such understanding, even words correctly identified and sentences accurately rendered fail to produce comprehension and thus represent only a pale facsimile of the normal reading process. (1985, 129)

Although they are talking about five-year-old children reading very elementary texts, it does not take much of an imaginative leap to transfer this description to the bewildered novice tackling *Wuthering Heights*, searching in vain for some hint of the return of Nelly Dean who seemed so important in the early chapters, becoming ever more distracted and losing track of the increasing complexity of the narrative organization. Even if accuracy is not lost, the sacrifice of momentum can be crucial.

In other words, the dynamics of reading, the temporal nature of the act which involves live decision-making with its costs and consequences, must not be overlooked in any study which purports to address the reality of the reading process. Nevertheless, we do have ways of "fixing" readings, of making them stationary, and we need to look at the relationship between such a permanent form of reading and the more transitory variety.

Maps and readings: texts, analyses, and readers

If the relationship between real and implied reader is a dynamic one, changing throughout the temporal project, the act of reading becomes even more difficult to describe. The text exists as an example of practice, and each reading is also an example of practice. On this principle, every reading is theoretically equal to every other reading. At one level, it is arguable that the reading need only satisfy its reader if that reader's purpose is simply to pass time agreeably. All reading is personal, it may be further argued, and who is the outsider to pass judgement on whether someone's reading is "adequate" or not?

Outside of the area of egregious errors of decoding, however, there may be degrees of accuracy, thoroughness, and insight in different readings. We may take these into consideration when judging the power of responses to a text, but in the final analysis, it is extremely difficult to separate the power of a particular reading from the power of persuasiveness in any given *account* of a reading or readings. In writing my critical account of a text, I may be analyzing its rhetorical force but my analysis is rhetorically couched as well. The critical essay cannot provide a definitive description of a text at work, nor can it provide rules for reading that text. It can only suggest.

Charles Taylor talks about the relationship between a specific, situated event, and a representation of that event. This distinction can be seen in the gap between the act of reading a text and a critical description of that text. Taylor's description provides some useful cautions about the place and value of such work. He cites the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

> Bourdieu argues that an important distortion occurs when we see the rule-as-represented as the effective factor. His claim, more specifically, is that this distortion arises when we take a situated, embodied sense or meaning and provide an explicit depiction of it. The difference in question may be

> illustrated by the gap separating our inarticulate familiarity with a certain environment (which enables us to make our way without hesitation) from the map that provides an explicit representation of this terrain. The practical ability exists only in its exercise, which unfolds in time and space. As you make your way around a familiar environment, the different locations and their inter-relations do not all impinge on you simultaneously. Your sense of them varies in function of where you are and where you are going. What is more, some relations never impinge on your consciousness at all. The route, and the relation of the landmarks, look quite different on the way out from how they appear on the way back; the way stations on the high road bear no relation to those on the low road. In practice, you make your way in and through time. The map, on the other hand, lays out everything simultaneously, relating each and every point, one to the other, without any discrimination whatsoever. . . .
>
> Maps or representations, by their very nature, abstract from lived time and space. To construe this kind of abstraction as the ultimate causal factor is to make the actual practice in time and space merely derivative, a mere application of a disengaged schema. (1992, 180)

This seems to me to be a very clear metaphor for the literary essay or the hermeneutic analysis. It is *not* the same thing as a description of a single reading; the landmarks can indeed be laid out simultaneously rather than temporally, even when the essay sticks to the chronology of the original work.

However, Taylor does not explore the idea that the exercise of creating such a map is itself a temporal activity. At the risk of sounding as portentous, say, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge discussing the intrusion of the visitor from Porlock, I would like to describe how I wrote my own engaged and analytical response to *Wolf*, after I had read it four or five times. (This account appears in Chapter 4.)

On a Thursday evening, I visited an adolescent literature class which was to discuss *Wolf*. There were about twenty readers and their opinions of the book varied widely. The discussion lasted about forty-five minutes and I left reeling with ideas. On Friday morning, I spent an hour of intense discussion with the course instructor before I returned to the word processor. My husband was away that weekend; my children were busy. From Friday to Sunday night, I alternately typed furiously and roamed around the house with my hands jammed in my pockets. I do not normally write in such a histrionic fashion. However, in this relatively seamless and organic way, I produced the bulk of my account of *Wolf* in that one weekend. Later, a few new ideas occurred to me, and I inserted, for example, some of the comments about the "Three Little Pigs" analogies. The completed essay, therefore, was not composed in exactly the order in which it now reads, although I hope that the joins are invisible.

I produce this fragment of autobiography, not as a testimonial to the worth of my account of *Wolf* nor because I think it is intrinsically interesting. It seems to me to show clearly one overlooked aspect of the map metaphor which Taylor and Bourdieu between them make so usefully. The map is a construct, after the event, not a causal factor. At no time did I read *Wolf* in the way described in my essay about it; that description is a composite. However, what seems to me to be very clear is that the *creation* of the map is also a temporal event, also a practice. We do not apply disengaged schemata to our activities, as Taylor rightly says, but the lifting of such an abstract description out of the embedded singularity of the event is an event in itself.

This distinction is important in a full description of reading. Just as we need to have a theory that will take account of ludic reading where response is immediate and fleeting, so we need to be able to make room for the appeal of the considered and formal reading which ends in written analysis. The critical essay is not a template which lies over the text pointing the way to the right reading; it is another example of practice, a record of one kind of relatively full consideration of ways in which the text works.

The readers of *Wolf* in this study will, in this metaphor, be providing their own rough maps as they describe their reactions to the text. On the continuum between the pure ludic reading and the intense, multiple, critical reading, they will lie somewhere near the mid-point. Their comments as they proceed will also be temporally located and will clearly influence the remainder of their reading. Something half-noticed does not have the same impact as something noticed and commented on, and the process of reporting is obviously going to affect the reading. Making a scribbled map as you walk clearly alters the way you look at the landscape; I see no way around this fact except to acknowledge that the research process will necessarily impinge on the reading process.

The map metaphor may be extended for a further look at the critical reading. The Ordnance Survey maps of the United Kingdom are extraordinarily meticulous and detailed. They have standardised symbols and markings and the key from one can be transferred to another in the same scale. Even allowing for the very occasional lapse, they provide a trustworthy guide to the countryside; a hiker would confidently set out into unknown territory with an OS map in hand.

Such a "map" could never be created for a text. In Taylor's metaphor, we appear to be talking about a sketch map. Aspects of the text co-exist simultaneously on this map, but human decisions have to be made about which part of the landscape goes in the centre of the map, about the scale of relationships between landmarks, about the size of symbols representing aspects of the text. Some maps may be more deftly constructed than others, but there is no authorised, standardised agency which provides the definitive layout, key and scale.

The creation of a map may be very satisfying to its maker, and the map itself may be highly informative to others, and even provide new ways of travelling through the "territory" it describes. But it is still an example of a particular kind of practice and its relationship to any one reading of the book is the relationship of one practice to another. The actual reading, no matter how informed by the balance of relationships contained in the map, still has to resemble more the travel through the landscape described by Taylor. We can skip around in a book, one of the virtues of printed text, but Taylor is correct that a landmark looks different when approached from different directions and we cannot alter this fact of reading either.

The making of the map, the writing of the critical essay, however, may be more useful and interesting than mere exercises in themselves. Geoffrey Williams has made an interesting observation on the role of criticism in understanding children's reading; he is talking about younger students than the readers of *Wolf* but his point remains valid:

> Children's fiction so often *invites* interpretative work because texts are open to subtle interpretations of narrative form and patterns of value, even when the language seems plain enough.
>
> Educational discourse about children's fiction, however, rarely acknowledges either the subtlety, openness or complexity of text. Despite vigorous general discussion of the appropriateness of some titles for children, in primary education we have been rather better at listening to children's interpretations in order to guess about their ability to comprehend than at investigating the complexity of the texts themselves. Yet the *form* of texts from which children are invited to learn to read is crucial to an account of what it is to comprehend them. A theory of how written texts mean which neglects form would be so seriously reductive as to be worthless.
>
> Criticism of children's texts could contribute very usefully to debate of contemporary definitions of literacy and literary competence and to debate about what counts as reading development. (1988, 152)

Williams goes on to quote Barthes from *S/Z*: "To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it." (Barthes 1974, 5)

Taylor is right in his observation that the trip through the landscape is not made possible by the map. On the other hand, Williams is also right when he comments, in effect, that some discussions about a landscape can be more usefully held with a map in hand. It is in that spirit that I will later offer the record of my own explorations of (at least some of) the plural that constitutes *Wolf*.

Some conclusions

Even talking about the early stages of learning how to create a story from print soon leads us into highly complicated mental territory. Practice leads to the distillation of conventional understandings and the development of strategies with a track record of probable success. Yet practice is always tied down to the specifics of accumulating experience text by text, with the constant and obligatory distraction of local politics and local affect on each occasion. Simply isolating the early stages is not enough to detach the reading process from its usual baggage of paradox and contradiction.

In this chapter I have attempted to pin down some of the experiences which lead to the development of successful reading behaviour. In the next chapter, I want to turn to an inspection of what actually happens as an experienced reader processes the words of a text.

Chapter 3

"REMEMBERING, REALIZING, AND NOT KNOWING YET": COMPLEX READING BEHAVIOUR

The complex web of strategies which enables us to establish a virtual relationship with an implied other in order to create an imagined, unlived experience rests on our ability to decode and construct meaning out of individual words on the page. In addition to learning how to imagine with words, we must establish ways of processing the words so that we can assemble a constructed sense out of the black marks on the paper. There is a great deal of research into the mental activity that occurs as we read. In this chapter I am going to concentrate on the processes which enable us to register and align words, phrases, sentences and chapters, assembling them into a coherent whole.

This chapter is unavoidably dense, but even so it is impossible to hope that it explains everything we do when we read. Furthermore, the issue of what we *experience* as we read is, to some extent, neglected in this chapter; although I have tried to make my description as holistic as possible, it is very difficult to keep all the balls in the air at one time and I do not pretend that I have succeeded here. Even with all these caveats, there is no doubt that we understand much more about the reading process than we did a generation ago, and the insights of different kinds of research can feed into each other in a very helpful and illuminating way.

Key terms

This chapter is larded with technical vocabulary and definitions are often complex and lengthy. Again, it may be helpful to start with an outline of the major points of interest and supply brief working definitions.

Word identification appears, not surprisingly, to be the key to reading. Current thinking holds that we actively look at nearly every word, passing our eyes very rapidly over the page and identifying patterns we recognize at the level of orthography, phonology, meaning and context.

Automaticity in reading involves all those processes that occur with no conscious attention being paid to them. Our brains are so designed that we can focus attention only in one direction at once. Where such aspects of reading as word identification, phrase and sentence composition, and other bottom-up forms of input cannot be handled automatically, they create a bottleneck or even a breakdown in the processing of text.

Schemata continue to be important in a more precise and specific account of reading activity. No text can supply every detail; schemata fill in the default values. Schemata also provide a top-down sense of shape and direction for a piece of writing; we have schematic expectations of a story, a poem, a set of instructions and use these to direct our attention in what seems the most productive ways.

Inference plays a major role in how we assemble our understanding of a text. We interpret by various means of assembling hints and instructions inscribed in the text in various ways. Obviously, our collection of schemata--both of general information and of specific text-based expectations--plays an important role here, as does the question of how and where we direct our attention.

Wrap-up is the activity of assembling the gist of a unit for storage in the working memory before proceeding to the next unit--phrase, sentence, paragraph or chapter. We clearly evoke our understanding of what is important and what is trivial in order to "chunk" the flood of data we are given by any text.

Cohesion involves ways of making links between one part of a text and another, to form connections across the "chunks" which we have grouped for mental storage. There are many varieties of such linkage.

Repertoire is a term involving background knowledge and understanding. A text may require a certain set of understandings of many kinds--social, symbolic, discursive, and so on. The reader also arrives at the reading act with a repertoire of awareness and strategic competencies. Some of this background, in both cases, is supplied intertextually, that is, by a history of exposure to other texts.

Word identification

Recognizing and supplying meanings for the printed words is the essential starting point for reading. This process starts with visual input. In her impressive summary of how beginners learn to read, Marilyn Jager Adams suggests that we filter the input through a set of related processors: orthographic, phonological, meaning, and context. She produces a model based on the work of a number of researchers:

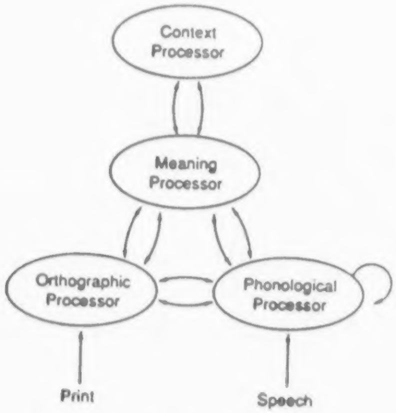

Figure 1 (Adams, 1990, 158)

The orthographic processor accepts data from the page, which activates possibilities in the other processors.

> The accuracy and speed of written word recognition depend first and foremost on the reader's familiarity with the word in print. The more frequently a spelling pattern has been processed, the more strongly its individual letters will facilitate each other's recognition within the

> Orthographic processor. The more frequently a written word has been interpreted, the stronger, more focused, and thus faster will be its connections to and from the Meaning processor. The more frequently a spelling pattern has been mapped onto a particular pronunciation, the stronger, more focused, and thus faster will be its connections to and from the Phonological processor.
>
> In short, when readers encounter a meaningful word that they have read many times before, the Orthographic processor will very quickly resonate to the pattern as a whole. Further, the word's meaning and phonological image will also be evoked with near instantaneity. (Adams, 1990, 160)

A highly predictable context will activate possible meanings and reduce the effort required to process a word:

> The exact amount of excitation that the Context processor will contribute to any given meaning unit depends on exactly how predictable it is. . . . In effect, such boosts in the excitation of a meaning give it a head start toward reaching consciousness. To the extent that a meaning is already turned on, it needs less input from the letter recognition network to become fully active. (1990, 138 - 139)

Context is also important for choosing the appropriate meaning for a particular word, though this exercise occurs after the word is identified. According to Charles Perfetti, however, all meanings, appropriate and otherwise, receive at least some initial activation. This may help to account for why we appreciate jokes, metaphors and certain kinds of ambiguity. (1985, 35)

Meaning may be activated by either the orthographic processor or the phonological processor. These two functions also activate each other. The meaning of the word may be activated directly through the orthographic route, but the phonological processor supplies two essential support systems. The first is an alternate route to meaning, an alphabetic back-up system of sounding out a word. The second is an aid to accurate memory of just-read words, particularly in complicated sentences where words must be grouped usefully in order to be processed. The "articulatory loop" in the diagram, the self-referring arrow in the phonological processor, represents the means by which it can re-activate itself through verbal rehearsal of the material just read. The orthographic processor can only be re-activated by referring back to the words on the page, so this capacity in the phonological processor can be very useful.

> By speaking or thinking the spoken images of the words to ourselves, we effectively renew their phonological activation, thus extending the longevity and holding capacity of our verbatim memory. (Adams, 1990, 188)

Readers do not consciously speak words to themselves, even silently, but a process of subvocalization, which is activated at the same time as the orthographic processor, helps to stabilise our memories of what we are reading sufficiently for us to make sense of complexly organized sentences.

Perfetti suggests that acquiring a functioning lexicon is the crucial element in learning to read: "*The major essential development in learning to read is the acquisition of individual word representations.*" (1992, 154, emphasis in original) Perfetti contends that our visual recognition must be autonomous and automatic.

> The main characteristic of an autonomous lexicon is its impenetrability. By definition, knowledge and expectations cannot penetrate an autonomous lexicon. (1992, 162)

He goes on to explain why this is important.

> [I]t is useful to clarify why an impenetrable lexicon is of value to the reader. Superficial analysis indeed leads to the opposite conclusion, namely that it is a fully interactive lexicon that is valuable. Such a lexicon allows information from all sources to penetrate lexical representations and makes the job of recognition easier. However this is a misleading analysis. The reader is served by expectations, knowledge, and beliefs in forming interpretations not in recognizing words. If expectations, knowledge, and beliefs actually penetrated the lexical representations, the identification of a word could become a hit-or-miss affair. Only if the graphic input has privileged status in access can accurate identification take place. Merely postponing the influence of expectations, knowledge, and beliefs a few precious milliseconds, so that it is the output of the identification process that is influenced, will make a more efficient system. (1992, 162)

Less skilled readers, young or old, do make more use of context, and their word identification processes are correspondingly slower. Perfetti suggests that as the result of practice and familiarity, lexical representations become fully specified and redundant. His account describes the importance of experience.

> Thus my suggestion is that the reading lexicon contains two sublexicons: a developing functional lexicon with representations under specified, and an autonomous lexicon with representations fully specified and redundant. A given word moves from the developing functional lexicon to the autonomous lexicon just when it becomes fully specified and redundant. This is essentially a word-by-word process. (1992, 163)

We use cues such as context and apply our understandings of letter-sound relationships to help us puzzle out unfamiliar words. Sometimes, of course, what we remember about a word is that such tactics are insufficient. I clearly remember an ongoing struggle with the word "Europe" when I was an early reader. I knew it was not pronounced "Ee-rup," but, for a long time, it was hit or miss whether I remembered to make use of the second vowel in sounding the word in my head. And knowing that my pronunciation was wrong made me perversely interested in just such a sounding-out process; I *wanted* to be right. In Perfetti's terms, I can remember getting closer and closer to a point of "encapsulation;" I recognized the progress when I started to get it right more of the time. Looking back on this experience now, I can identify my attempts to interweave practice with convention (unhelpful in this case) and process (look at the u when the e is misleading!)

A related question about word identification raises the issue of whether we actually look at every word as we read. Charles Perfetti is quite categorical on that subject:

> There is a general impression that we read words in bunches, skipping over

> many words. We read selectively, by this account. This impression does not reflect reality. The fact is that when we read the eyes come to rest on (*fixate*) most of the words of the text. Not many words are skipped.
>
> There have been many studies of eye fixations and they reveal some important facts, some counterintuitive, about what the eyes are doing. The two most important may be these: (1) In normal reading, most words are fixated. (2) During a fixation, only limited information can be obtained from the visual periphery. Beyond five or six character spaces to the right of the fixation, letters are not perceived. There is a third fact worth noting: (3) Little information concerning words or letters is obtained during the eye's movement from one fixation to another (a *saccade*). Fact number 1 seems to be to be [*sic*] determined by facts 2 and 3. If information is obtained only during fixations, and then only within a few character spaces right of the fixation, then successful reading depends on fixating many words, not just a few. (1985, 14)

As Perfetti rightly remarks, some of this information seems counterintuitive, especially to people like myself who do a great deal of re-reading. I have often experienced surprises on a third or fourth reading of a text, registering words and sentences that seem completely new to me. Given Perfetti's description of eye fixation, this fact seems unreasonable if not impossible.

However, there are many stages in the process of reading where information can be lost, especially in the kind of reading where recall is not at a premium. Just because the eye fixates on a word does not mean that this word reaches the stage of functional storage in the working memory. And even making it into the working memory does not guarantee a place in long-term memory; many of the readers in this study articulated ideas that later seem to have sunk without trace. As we proceed in our account of the reading process, we shall find many places where information about a particular word or phrase can make a very complete escape from the mind of the reader.

Bussis *et al.*, in their substantial account of learning readers, suggest that readers need to find a way of achieving a balance between momentum and accuracy in their reading.

> The basis for the accuracy/momentum distinction hinges on our theoretical conception that anticipation and accountability are the dual requirements for constructing meaning from text. Anticipation sustains the momentum and flow of the action through time, while accountability ensures that the action stays on course.
>
> Proficient readers, by definition, can orchestrate knowledge smoothly to satisfy both the momentum and accuracy requirements of virtually any text within their conceptual grasp. Beginning readers, by definition, cannot yet do this. Their proficient performances occur sporadically and are gained through considerable practice. (1985, 134)

Bussis *et al.* suggest that among a substantial number of their young subjects there was a distinctly observable learning style which led these children, in the early stages of learning to read, to show a pronounced bias in favour of one or the other, to read for momentum, making greater use of anticipation, or to read for accuracy, paying greater attention to the need for accountability to the text. Not all children showed this kind of bias, and even those with a pronounced tendency towards one end of the spectrum or the other, showed a more balanced approach to texts as their capacities increased and consolidated.

> When confronted with unfamiliar and challenging text later on, however, most children returned to their initial preference. In this respect, their behavior was reminiscent of stylistic differences in adult approaches to difficult text. Some adults read such text quickly, extracting what meaning they can, and then go back as many times as necessary to fill in the details. Others take a much slower initial pace, attempting to construct (and often arguing with) the author's meaning at every step of the way. We suspect that the "reverting behavior" observed in many children portends their future strategies of dealing with difficult material. (1985, 179)

Even at the starting point of reading, therefore, learning to recognize words and word families, swiftly and effortlessly, there would appear to be other factors at work--and at work differentially for different readers. The documentation supplied by this substantial study shows children approaching identical tasks in very different ways.

Attention, automaticity and concept activation

When we read, numerous activities occur in our brains at the same time. If we tried to pay attention to them all at once we would never get started, so some activities must be able to run themselves without attention. A consideration of this automatic pilot raises many questions.

LaBerge and Samuels develop a theory of automatic information processing which throws some light on how the reader copes with many activities and processes at once.

> [T]he present theory proposes . . . that attention can selectively activate codes at any level of the system, not only at the deeper levels of meaning, but also at visual and auditory levels nearer the sensory surfaces. The number of existing codes of any kind that can be activated by attention at a given moment is sharply limited, probably to one. But the number of codes which can be simultaneously activated by outside stimuli independent of attention is assumed to be large, perhaps unlimited. In short, it is assumed that we can only attend to one thing at a time, but we may be able to process many things at a time, so long as no more than one requires attention. (1985, 690 - 691)

Often, say LaBerge and Samuels, "people appear to be giving attention to two or more things at the same time, when, in fact, they are shifting attention rapidly between the tasks." (1985, 691)

The transition between two automatic processes must also be automatic if there is not to be the distraction of actually having to attend to the shift as it occurs.

Marilyn Jager Adams relates this question of automaticity to the importance of word recognition. To make sense of a sentence, she says, we must attend not to individual words but to the relations between them. Many words have multiple meanings; we must be able to use context to select and if necessary re-select the most appropriate meaning.

> It is because the process of comprehension consists of actively searching the overlap among words for syntactic and semantic coherence that reading depends so critically on the speed and automaticity of word recognition. Although the words of a text necessarily arrive sequentially, the activation of each dwindles away quite rapidly once the eye has turned to the next. Hence the importance of speed: In order for each of a series of words to be aroused at once, all must be perceived in rapid sequence. The importance of automaticity relates to the fact that the search for coherence requires active, thoughtful attention. Where a reader is instead wrestling with the resolution of any particular word, syllable, or letter of the text, comprehension is necessarily forfeited. For it to be recovered, the phrase must be reread with fluency. (1990, 413)

LaBerge and Samuels describe some of the information that must be processed automatically if the reader is to attain

> what many consider the goal of fluent reading: the reader can maintain his attention continuously on the meaning units of semantic memory, while the decoding from visual to semantic systems proceeds automatically. . . . [T]he reader often has the option of several different ways of processing a given word. When he encounters a word he does not understand, his attention may be shifted to the phonological level to read out the sound for attempts at retrieval from episodic memory. At other times he may shift his attention to the visual level and attempt to associate spelling patterns with phonological units, which are then blended into a word which makes contact with meaning. When the decoding and comprehension processes are automatic, reading appears to be "easy." When they require attention to complete their operations, reading seems to be "difficult."
>
> One could say that every time a word code requires attention we are made aware of that aspect of the reading process. For example, when we encounter a word that does not make sense, we may speak it and thereby are momentarily aware of the sound of the words we are reading. Or if the word does not sound right to us, we may examine its spelling patterns, thereby becoming aware of its visual aspects. However, when reading is flowing at its best, for example in reading a mystery novel in which the vocabulary is very familiar, we can go along for many minutes imagining ourselves with the detective walking the streets of London, and apparently we have not given a bit of attention to any of the decoding processes that have been transforming marks on the page into the deeper systems of comprehension. (1985, 709)

LaBerge and Samuels here imply a certain virtue to automatic processing which does not necessarily stand up in literary terms. Automatic processing may be interrupted by an unfamiliar word, but it may also be disrupted by delight, surprise, distress, a startling recognition, a profound moment of insight. Stephen Heath, in his translator's note to *Image Music Text* by Roland Barthes, effectively describes such a break in his attempt to distinguish between *plaisir* and *jouissance*:

> on the one hand a pleasure (*plaisir*) linked to cultural enjoyment and identity, to the cultural enjoyment of identity, to a homogenizing movement of the ego; on the other a radically violent pleasure (*jouissance*) which shatters--dissipates, loses--that cultural identity, that ego. (1977, 9)

Jerome Bruner describes that interruption of automaticity we call surprise:

> Surprise is an extraordinarily useful phenomenon to students of mind, for it allows us to probe what people take for granted. It provides a window on presupposition: surprise is a response to violated presupposition. Presupposition, of course, is what is taken for granted, what is expected to be the case. . . .If what impinges on us conforms to expectancy, to the predicted state of the model, we may let our attention flag a little, look elsewhere, even go to sleep. Let input violate expectancy, and the system is put on alert. Any input, then, must be conceived of as being made up not only of environmentally produced stimulation but also of accompanying markings of its conformity with or discrepancy from what the nervous system is expecting. If all is in conformity, we adapt and may even stop noticing, as we stop noticing the touch sensation produced by our clothes or the lint on the lens of our eyeglasses. (1986, 46)

Affective interruptions can also be simply very personal; even at my age, I often pause at the word "Margaret" when I see it in print, just to notice the shape of the word on the page. I have, of course, over-learned this word long ago but it is unusual for me to process it automatically. Quite often, I even register the typeface to the extent of noticing the g and the two a's, although in other normal reading the typeface never intrudes on my conscious attention.

Dennie Palmer Wolf describes a case of interrupted automaticity in its most positive sense:

> As a student reads Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," she may read "go gentle" as "go gently" and then return to the phrase puzzled. Until she decides what sense to make of this unexpected pattern, she may think quite literally about the print on the page. A split second later, she may move on to ask why poems have to make hash of ordinary language. If she sticks with the poem long enough to sense the mix of tenderness and rage there, her own personal or cultural memory may be unlocked--opening an album of snapshots out of her past and a tumble of images of children saved, protected, and delighted by their fathers. . . . With luck, the poem will resonate for her, recalling other texts (lullabies her father sang to her, bedtime rituals they had together, maybe *All My Sons* or *Death of a Salesman. . . .*) All in the same moment, she may reflect on her current sense for how she reads. She may note, for instance, that this time out metaphors seem less strange than they once did, but that now it is the tone of the writing that she cannot pin down. Her reading is layered. Far from simply matching strokes and dots to meanings, her reading is also a process of remembering, realizing, and not knowing yet. (1988, 6)

This account of the breaking of automaticity highlights many vital aspects of reading. Yet, in celebrating the strengths of reflective reading, we must not ignore the vital role of the automatic processes. Robeck and Wallace outline other aspects of attention and automaticity. They describe such attentional mechanisms as the capacity to sustain focus on a particular problem, blocking out distractions, the ability "to select from multisensory bombardment and previous stored experience those elements that *could* be relevant to the current problem context" (1990, 40 - 41), and the potential to interrupt the most absorbed attentiveness to allow a shift of focus when the environmental conditions demand such an adaptation, for example to consider the reader's own safety or comfort.

They also describe in slightly greater detail some of the processes that need to work automatically together.

> Attention brings together the selective information from the senses and associated information from memory into the awareness of the person engaged in the process. Memory retrieval that focuses on potentially relevant elements is a potent factor in information processing. The excitation of sensory subsystems that are relevant to the task and the inhibition of extraneous stimuli are *automatic processes*. They follow sequentially, without effort on the part of the individual if the motivation to attend is present and the mechanisms of attention are normal. (1990, 41)

Bruner draws our attention to the way in which the "inhibition of extraneous stimuli" is closely tied to our understanding of conventional expectations:

> The study of human perception reveals how powerfully constrained our perceptual system is by this deep principle. Thresholds, the amount of time and input necessary for seeing or recognizing an object or event, are closely governed by expectancy. The more expected an event, the more easily it is seen or heard. . . . The more unexpected the information, the more processing space it takes up. All this is banal enough, but its implications are anything but that. For it means that perception is to some unspecifiable degree an instrument of the world as we have structured it by our expectancies. Moreover, it is characteristic of complex perceptual processes that they tend where possible to assimilate whatever is seen or heard to what is expected. (1986, 46 - 47)

Victor Nell explored many aspects of what we might consider the most automatic form of reading there is: what he calls ludic reading. Ludic reading is defined thus:

> Pleasure reading is playful: it is free activity standing outside ordinary life; it absorbs the player completely, is unproductive, and takes place within circumscribed limits of space and time. . . . "Ludic reading" (from the Latin *ludo*, I play . . .) is therefore a useful characterization of pleasure reading, reminding us that it is a root a play activity, intrinsically motivated and usually paratelic, that is engaged in for its own sake. (1988, 2)

In exploring how ludic reading works, Nell explores degrees of absorption, even entrancement, which undemanding reading can create. In his descriptions of ludic reading, he is talking about the most automatic forms of processing and declares that one requirement of such reading is that no response must be expected. Once the reader begins to concentrate on aspects of response the automatic, effortless processing is lost.

Nell looks at attention in this context:

> Attention and consciousness are not synonymous. With practice, cognition can become so routinized that most information processing takes place unconsciously. It may therefore be useful to regard consciousness as a processing bottleneck reserved for special tasks. . . . Skilled reading is an amalgam of highly automated processes (word recognition, syntactic parsing, and so on) that make no demands on conscious processing and extraction of meaning from long continuous texts by the application of discourse-processing strategies. . . . The latter do indeed make heavy demands on conscious attention. (1988, 76)

How is automaticity triggered? Some of it must simply be force of habit. Experienced readers can find themselves slipping into automaticity even when it is inappropriate, reading words and pages faster than they can handle intellectually. It seems reasonable to assert that it will be more common in the middle stages of a story, when the preliminary information is in place. It is worth noting that Nell's strategy for studying ludic reading involved asking his participants to read the first 50 pages of a book and to make all the preliminary decisions about whether they wanted to continue before they arrived for their session with him. All his work on the physiological effects of reading involved readers who were past the initial and most effortful stages of a story.

At the start of a book, unless it is one of a very predictable series, there are too many potential problems, both cognitive and affective, for the reader to slide into automatic gear immediately. The reader of the initial pages of a story is wary and alert. Hugh Crago has described this process of "getting into" a story. He took notes of his first reading of *A Chance Child* by Jill Paton Walsh.

> The notes cluster thickest around the first part of the book: after page 110 I just read, and then added some comments on my feelings at the climax of the story after I'd finished. What had happened to me was, of course, the familiar process of gradually increasing immersion in the world created by the novel, an immersion which enables the reader less and less awareness of anything but that world. I could have short-circuited the process by deliberately stopping at regular intervals and forcing myself thereby to retain more "outside' consciousness, but I chose not to do this. Because of this choice, it is borne home to me just how crucial in forming my opinions of a new book the first few pages, the first few chapters, are. For, after I emerge from the "trance" into which a just-completed novel has put me, and look back on the over-all experience, it is on those very early impressions, associations and intuitions that I rely in order to make sense of the whole. (1982, 173)

Crago analyses those initial sortings of early impressions, associations and intuitions, comparing his reaction to those of his daughter whose early reading experiences he captured in a diary and to those of another child described in his reactions to stories being read aloud. In the early stages of a text, all three of these readers raised many questions about meanings of words, location and time of the story, identity of characters and so forth. As the story progressed, these questions faded away. Crago remarks:

> Indeed, it would be surprising if both adults and children did not evidence this process of active grappling with the opening stages of a new aesthetic experience before becoming more completely absorbed. A common-sense explanation would be that we need to establish our points of reference before we can expect to understand the rest of a tale. A less obvious and by no means contradictory explanation (since the cognitive and emotional are so often two sides of the one coin) is that all readers of whatever age need a *defence* against the emotional impact of the new imaginative experience provided by a novel (or picture book, or movie) and that they defend themselves by moving in and out of the world of the novel, asking questions about it, comparing it with their own world--being very *rational* precisely because they are under *emotional* threat. (1982, 179)

Even though art is supposed to be pleasurable, Crago defends this concept of emotional threat.

> For me, beginning a new novel, watching the curtain go up on a play or a movie, means a threat to the extent that I'm forced, temporarily, to submit myself to somebody else's world; some aspects of that world are bound to be alien to me, and may generate feelings of disquiet, even of anger. That I know I'm *choosing* to undergo this because I also expect to derive pleasure from it doesn't help. I have to pass through this stage every time, until the tale takes hold and absorption becomes more pleasurable than threatening. (1982, 180)

As long as this feeling of wariness exists, it is hard to imagine an automatic process taking over. Word recognition proceeds automatically, but even the next step, the construction of coherent sentences, may require more conscious attention than usual; the reader does not slip easily into the world of the text. Formula writing is one route to an early feeling of confidence. Experience of such writing leads even young readers to a sensation of trust and relaxation. Arthur Applebee quotes a boy aged 9.3 on Enid Blyton:

> I think that the Famous Five stori's are quite good. In the stories there is a lot of adventure and a lot of things happen. They get bad luke at the beginning and thing all kam out all right in the end. (1978, 94)

If you know that the initial "bad luke" will "kam out all right in the end," you can switch to automatic processes much more readily.

James Squire's account of the ways 52 adolescents read four short stories supports some of Crago's ideas. He summed up his findings (rather curiously in terms of failures rather than successes) as follows:

> A study of the transcripts reveals six sources of difficulty to be particularly widespread among these 52 adolescent readers: the reader fails to grasp the most obvious meanings of the author; the reader relies on stock responses when faced with a seemingly familiar situation; the reader is "happiness

> bound"; the reader approaches literature with certain critical predispositions; the reader is sidetracked by irrelevant associations; and the reader is determined to achieve certainty in interpretation and is unwilling to hold judgment in abeyance. Other causes of difficulty occur, but these are the most common. (1964, 37)

Squire made a number of other interesting observations. He found that readers tended to make literary judgements at the beginning and ending stages of reading a story. In the middle parts, they exchanged such forms of judgement for statements of engagement with the text. The relationship was closer than that, however; readers who were emotionally involved in the story actually made more literary judgements.

Squire's work was published in 1964. More recently, Judith Langer (1989) has produced a study which reinforces some of these suggestions about how reading works. She worked with 36 students, half each in Grades 7 and 11. They read six texts: two poems, two short stories, and two non-fiction texts, one from a science textbook and one from a social studies textbook. They produced think-aloud protocols for all these readings, and Langer found four main stages, or stances, reflected in all the kinds of readings she studied:

> The four major stances in the process of understanding were:
> * *Being Out and Stepping Into an Envisionment*--In this stance, readers attempted to make initial contacts with the genre, content, structure, and language of the text by using prior knowledge, experiences, and surface features of the text to identify essential elements in order to begin to construct an envisionment.
> * *Being In and Moving Through an Envisionment*--In this stance, readers were immersed in their understandings, using their previously constructed envisionment, prior knowledge and the text itself to further their creation of meaning. For the readers, meaning-making moved along with the text; they were caught up in a story or carried along by the argument of a non-literary work.
> * *Stepping Back and Rethinking What One Knows*--In this stance, readers used their envisionments to reflect on their own previous knowledge or understandings. While prior knowledge informed their envisionments in the other stances, in this case readers used their envisionments to rethink what they already knew.
> * *Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience*--In this stance, readers distanced themselves from their envisionments, reflecting on and reacting to the content, to the text, or to the reading experience itself. (1989, 7)

In spite of her elaborate vocabulary, Langer describes some basic stages of reading, and it is not hard to make connections between these categories and Squire's description of the students making their literary judgements in the early and late stages of the reading, being immersed in the story in the middle stages.

Whether you call it "being absorbed in the story" or "being in and moving through an envisionment," there is considerable room for exploration of the relationship between this feeling of immersion and the functioning of automatic processes. Do we feel completely caught up in the story *only* when we are reading automatically? Does any kind of critical or interrogative detachment reduce our sense of absorption, or is that a reductive description of engaged reading? Literary thinkers sometimes have a tendency to devalue the kind of reading that is done automatically, and there are many unanswered questions in this area.

In the terms of this study, both the initial sorting out of data and the later transition to more automatic and absorbed reading seem to me to be examples of discourse processes. Successful readers have learned that these are things you have to *do* to read a text. And yet, the disentanglement is not straightforward. As Bruner reminds us, one of the most powerful things you *do* when you read is to expect--and what you expect leads us straight back to the conventions, the nouns of the operation.

Kendell Walton throws an interesting light on some of these questions, approaching the issue not from the perspective of processing the words through the brain but from the perspective of how we imagine. He is talking about a game where the rule is that stumps are to be imagined to be bears and treated as such. He talks about the efficacy of such a rule in this kind of game, as opposed to an instruction to imagine that there is a bear in the path and act accordingly.

> Following instructions is more likely to require reflection and deliberation on the part of the imaginer, especially if the instructions are complicated. One may well respond more automatically to a reasonably realistic "likeness." Heather doesn't need to *decide* whether to imagine a bear when she confronts the stump, or whether to imagine that it is large or small, facing her or facing away from her, and so on. The stump makes many of these decisions for her. Imaginings induced by prompters like stumps and toy trucks, even elaborately detailed imaginings, are often less contrived and deliberate, more spontaneous, than are imaginings in response to instructions. (1990, 22 - 23)

A fictional text may well serve as a prompter in Walton's sense, in terms of its capacity to arouse immediate responses as opposed to a set of instructions to imagine in a particular way. The spontaneousness of the imagining is the top-down equivalent to the bottom-up automaticity of the processing of the individual words and phrases.

Gale M. Sinatra and James M. Royer suggest a useful term to describe some of this process: "concept activation." Their definition of this phrase is very thin; they use it to describe "speed of access to conceptual memory," (1993, 512) and measure it by asking subjects to decide whether two words belong to the same category. I would suggest that we can make more fruitful use of the phrase. If recognition of a word comes automatically and if the concept related to that word is also awakened automatically, we can see a route to the kind of triggered but spontaneous imagining described by Walton.

In their substantial study of young children learning to read, Bussis *et al.* address the idea of concept activation, although this is not a term they use.

> Evidence from the study suggests that children inevitably mobilize background knowledge in reading if it is at all possible for them to do so (if the text has meaningful substance and if the child possesses the relevant knowledge). This act is not essentially a matter of conscious effort or of being encouraged to do so, but rather a matter of not being able to do

> otherwise. People spontaneously bring what they know to bear in identifying and interpreting the content of any event, whether it be a tree, a face, a traffic jam, or a book. (1985, 72)

Charles Perfetti usefully links this issue to the question of representation.

> The general form of the representation question is: How are words represented in the mind? It may be possible to have a theory of reading acquisition without addressing the representation of words. . . . But behind any process of pattern recognition is the form of knowledge that allow recognition. . . . The access question is how a printed word comes to cause a reader's mental representation of a word to be activated and accessed by a printed stimulus. (1992, 146)

Perfetti's account of the autonomous and impenetrable lexicon clearly feeds into issues of automaticity. The more readily and speedily the orthographic input supplies the encapsulated response, the more automatic the reading process.

How do we align Perfetti's account with the descriptions above which relate certain kinds of response (puzzlement, referentiality, *jouissance*) to the interruption of automaticity? It seems most clear-cut to suggest that he is arguing that such reactions are post-lexical, that we activate the automatic, encapsulated recognition of the word a few milliseconds ahead of the response. What such a reaction then interferes with is the continuation of further automatic word processing.

By this account we recognize the word, we activate the concept associated with it, and we align the word with the surrounding words, all with a minimum of specific attention. How our reading proceeds is the subject of the next sections.

Schemata and scripts in fluent reading

We have already looked at the role of schemata and scripts in learning to read, but they continue to be highly important aspects of competent reading and there is much more to be said about them.

How do readers make use of the collection of shadowy shapes and mental structures which organize their repertoires of world and text experiences?

It seems clear that the development of schemata is one important route of transition from accumulated individual practices to useful understandings of conventions and processes. It should be helpful to consider the utility of descriptions of this operation from the perspectives of both reading research and literary theory.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (1990) does not have an entry for "schema." However, other documents make up for this oversight in more than ample terms. There are many definitions of and approaches to schema theory. Rumelhart calls schemata "the building blocks of cognition." (1980, 33) Anderson and Pearson say, "A schema is an abstract knowledge structure." (1984, 259) Branigan provides a more elaborate definition:

> A schema is an arrangement of knowledge *already possessed* by a perceiver that is used to predict and classify new sensory data. The assumption underlying this concept is simply that people's knowledge is organized. The fact that one often knows immediately what one *does not know* testifies to the structured nature of our knowledge. . . . A schema assigns probabilities to events and to parts of events. It may be thought of as a graded set of expectations about experience in a given domain. (1992, 13)

Iran-Nejad challenges the static concept implied by words such as "structure." He observes, "For many theorists who use it, the term *schema* has come to be synonymous with the term *long-term memory structure*." (1987, 111) Iran-Nejad argues that it may be a more transient phenomenon, and draws on an analogy of a light constellation, where elements (the flashing lights in his metaphor) can be used in more than one pattern, temporarily activated as required. Instead of analyzing a pre-existing set of structures in the mind, Iran-Nejad looks at a process or a function.

I am certainly not competent to do more than note this debate. However the neurons go about it, the idea of some kind of mental collection of groups of data is clearly helpful to an understanding of reading. No text ever provides complete information. The reader must fill in the picture and we do this at least partially by use of schemata.

Schema theory offers many attractive insights into the reading process. The ability to fill in a partial image, smoothing over deficiencies of data with default values, is obviously essential if text is ever to proceed beyond the most minute accounting for every conceivable detail. Furthermore, as schemata are accumulated over years of learning how the world works, the scope for social, cultural and ideological input is clearly enormous. If we are looking for ways to understand how children become acculturated to a particular way of viewing the world, schema theory makes a great deal of sense.

Charles Perfetti has explored some of the ways in which world knowledge, stored in schema form, affects how we read. He looked at a study of reading and listening in which background knowledge made a big difference:

> In these experiments, subjects were matched in general reading ability and differed only in their knowledge of the rules of baseball. That is, they differed in their knowledge of the game's structure--its action schema--rather than in "baseball trivia." (1985, 73)

Given an account of a half-inning of play of a fictitious baseball game, subjects then differed considerably in what they recalled. Those with a high knowledge of baseball not only recalled more, they recalled differently.

> High-knowledge subjects recalled more information about events that were significant for the game itself, i.e. the events that make up the game's essential structure. (1985, 74)

Those with a low knowledge of baseball did recall high-level events such as the final outcome of the game. They also remembered details that were not particularly relevant. Where they differed was at an intermediate level of those events which brought about changes in the outcome of the game.

> The role of schema activation . . . seems important here. By having goal structure schemata for baseball, readers . . . will have these structures activated during the processing of the text. This should allow them to build a text model by linking action sequences appropriately. . . . The effect of knowledge on comprehension can be described as an effect of schema activation on the encoding of propositions in working memory and on the construction of the text model. (1985, 74 - 75)

Perfetti points out, quite reasonably, that issues of background knowledge are not questions of reading ability. However, the kind of information the reader brings to the text certainly affects the reading *experience*, and he expands his baseball reference to outline further possibilities:

> Actually there is more to knowledge than the mere having of it. Suppose, for example, that two individuals can each be said to have a schema for a baseball game, i.e., each knows the essential structure of the game. . . . However, suppose that one of the individuals has actively participated in relevant goal structure activity, e.g., managing (even a Little League team) or playing simulated games. These two individuals might have equivalent schemata in the minimal structural sense, but not necessarily in their elaborated structures. For example, the "manager" may have a much richer set of connections to specific subgoal structures. These connections would represent strategies for advancing base runners that depend on such things as the number of outs, the prospects of the next hitter, the speed of the base runner, the bunting ability of the present hitter, as well as the score and the inning. It is easy to imagine that there are consequences of such an enriched network for processing. . . . [I]ndividuals can differ not just in knowledge necessary for understanding, nor even just in the presence of basic goal structure knowledge, but also in richness or degree of elaboration of their schemata. (1985, 76)

Baseball provides a good framework for discussing some of the ways in which the reader's background understanding may affect the encounter with a text. Those with sufficient understanding of baseball and its formal descriptors can read a text which is completely closed to others with less knowledge, the outline sketch of the game recorded in virtual code on the sports page. Reading a few numbers and letters, such readers may be able to recreate the entire game in their minds, at a level approaching something like automaticity. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the danger of saturation and banality; a reader overly familiar with accounts of key moments in games may fail to engage with yet one more such description. The role of the schema, like everything else about reading, is not invariably clearcut and straightforward.

So far, we have looked at the role of the schema in relating the text to the reader's information about the world. There is another role for the schema in reading, however. Reading experience creates its own schemata of the reading process itself: listeners and readers begin to build up mental framings of how *texts* usually work.

Jean Matter Mandler describes three specific kinds of schemata. One is the script, which is an event schema. It includes knowledge about what will happen in a given situation, often specifying an order of events as well.

The second is a scene schema. This involves spatial rather than temporal relations and includes smaller schemata embedded within larger ones; for example, we may have a spatial schema for a kitchen and also one for the interior of a refrigerator.

Mandler's third type of schema is a story schema,

> a mental structure consisting of sets of expectations about the way in which stories proceed. . . . [T]he story schema is a mental reflection of the regularities that the processor has discovered (or constructed) through interacting with stories. (1984, 18)

A story schema, by this definition, is a tool which a reader calls in aid in the process of making sense of how a story is working. It plays a role in the establishment of expectations, which may or may not be met. Applebee's nine-year-old, talking about Enid Blyton's Famous Five, would certainly seem to be outlining one particular story schema, and Blyton, of course, does not feature many surprises or departures from the expected situation.

Peter Rabinowitz has observed that a set of expectations is important whether the expectations are met or not. His "rules of configuration," which outline our expectations about how a text can be put together, are not exactly equivalent to a story schema but there is clearly a strong relationship between the two concepts.

> [I]n a given literary context, when certain elements appear, rules of configuration activate certain expectations. Once activated, however, these expectations can be exploited in a number of different ways. Authors can make use of them not only to create a sense of resolution (that is, by completing the patterns that the rules lead readers to expect, either with or without detours) but also to create surprise (by reversing them, for instance, by deflecting them, or by fulfilling them in some unanticipated way) or to irritate (by purposefully failing to fulfill them). It is important to stress this point: a rule of configuration can be just as important to the reading experience when the outcomes it predicts turn out not to take place as when they do. (1987, 111)

Rabinowitz supplies three other sets of "rules" as well: rules of notice which we use to decide what to pay attention to; rules of signification which help us to decide how to pay attention to what we have decided is important; and rules of coherence which we invoke to make sense of the story as a whole. These rules may well represent a more detailed working out of a particular story schema; in the case Rabinowitz describes, it is the schema that applies to more or less conventional nineteenth and twentieth century Western fictional prose.

General schemata are regularly called into play to make sense of the limited range of clues any text can offer. There are various ways to describe this process: fleshing out the words, reading between the lines, breathing life into the characters, filling in the blanks. Yet we need to be wary of ways in which our story schemata affect our general schemata. Seymour Chatman supplies one example of an overlap:

> Whether the narrative is experienced through a performance or through a text, the members of the audience must respond with an interpretation: they cannot avoid participating in the transaction. They must fill in gaps with essential or likely events, traits and objects which for various reasons have gone unmentioned. If in one sentence we are told that John got dressed and in the next that he rushed to an airport ticket counter, we surmise that in the interval occurred a number of artistically inessential yet logically necessary events: grabbing his suitcase, walking from the bedroom to the living room and out the front door, then to his car or to the bus or to a taxi, opening the door of the car, getting in, and so on. The audience's capacity to supply plausible details is virtually limitless, as is a geometer's to conceive of an infinity of fractional spaces between two points. Not, of course, that we do so in normal reading. We are speaking only of a logical property of narratives: that they evoke a world of potential plot details, many of which go unmentioned but can be supplied. The same is true of character. We may project any number of additional details about characters on the basis of what is expressly said. If a girl is portrayed as "blue-eyed," "blonde," and "graceful," we assume further that her skin is fair and unblemished, that she speaks with a gentle voice, that her feet are relatively small, and so on. (The facts may be other, but we have to be told so, and our inferential capacity remains undaunted. Indeed, we go on to infer a variety of details to account for the "discrepancy.") (1978, 28 - 29)

Kendell Walton also subscribes to the importance of the default values in a schema to our understanding of how we imagine:

> Fictional truths breed like rabbits. The progeny of even a few primary ones can furnish a small world rather handsomely. We are usually entitled to assume that characters have blood in their veins, just because they are people, even if their blood is never mentioned or described or shown or portrayed. It is fictional in *La Grande Jatte* that the couple strolling in the park eat and sleep and work and play; that they have friends and rivals, ambitions, satisfactions, and disappointments; that they live on a planet that spins on its axis and circles the sun, one with weather and seasons, mountains and oceans, peace and war, industry and agriculture, poverty and plenty; and so on and on and on. All this is implied, in the absence of contrary indications, by the fact that fictionally they are human beings.
>
> Many such implied fictional truths are generated more or less by default, and many are of no particular interest (although if it were fictional that people did *not* have blood in their veins or births or ambitions, *this* fictional truth would be noteworthy). (1990, 142)

This aspect of reading, of course, is wide open to the admission of the stock image, the stereotype, the ideologically charged cliche. Lennard Davis challenges that feature of written text that can properly be called "schematic":

> The ideology of the novel *has* to make readers forget about the fullness and sensuousness of lived experience.
>
> Rather the idea of character in a novel becomes subsumed to another system--in a way not so dissimilar to the way the culture that produced the novel subsumed individuals and groups to a dominant system of production

> and meaning. As the domination of ideology over politics becomes a rule in western Europe, character becomes in effect a personal way of forgetting about the increasing contradictions in daily life. As human experience becomes more and more commodified, the very commodifying process of buying and selling novels becomes paradoxically a way out of readers' feelings of being marginalized and objectified; it is in the objectified unit of character that people come to believe that they can find their true selves--or their better selves. Avoiding the quality of experience that comes from living in time--with millions of individual moments in an ordinary day--readers can posit beings who are not of the moment, or the sum of the moments, but who transcend moments. As Sterne reminds us, to include all moments--the itchy foot, the casual gesture of checking for one's wallet on the subway, searching with the tongue for the raspberry seed between the canine and the molar--is impossible in the novel. The novel depends on the fact that characters usually do not itch at the moment they have a major realization about life--and if they do, there is a reason for it. The universal quality of characters and narrators always derives from their objectified status. The main point here is that character is always isolated from life--whether in the plot itself as outsider, disinherited, orphan, or criminal--or even from the details of lived experience. Whereas lived experience and personality is formed amorphously and cumulatively, characters in novels are formed from a series of discrete and isolated moments designed by the author for their impact. So, the isolation of the character from any deep involvement in the quotidian renders character the ultimate in alienated consciousness. And, ironically, if we read to escape loneliness we do so by observing the life of a character who is centrally isolated. (1987, 154 - 155)

It is not necessary to agree entirely with Davis's jeremiad about commodification to accept some of his strictures about the artificiality of characters' constantly significant activities, the telling nature of every detail. Davis does not suggest that we supply some of the missing quotidian detail and richness, at least in shadowy form, by the activation of particular schemata, but it seems that schema theory accounts for a great deal in this area, and does not contradict anything he says.

Writers, of course, manipulate gaps for effect. If a reader is led to create the dainty blonde girl described by Chatman above, the writer then has the option of fulfilling all our stereotyped expectations about this character or of introducing discrepancies in the cause of surprise, humour, deceit or whatever. If all our schemata work efficiently in the processing of the story and are never challenged, we may conclude the book thinking that our mental picture of the world is both accurate and complete. Such reinforcement may be aesthetically charged but it cannot escape being ideologically charged as well. Of course, many readers choose books that will challenge their schemata, though it is unlikely that they phrase it to themselves in those words. A writer like George Eliot always pleases me in the way that she introduces subtle particularities that undermine the placid stereotype I am inveterately building from her very first details onward. In Davis's terms, she produces a much fuller sense of being engaged in the quotidian nature of life, simply because she is constantly creating small surprises. Of course, this is not sufficient to release her from Davis's charge of manipulation.

Our general schemata, then, provide ways of grouping details into some collection of relatively abstract patterns. As Robeck and Wallace have observed, much of this seems to happen automatically. At a different level, our literary schemata appear to affect the actual process of reading as it occurs. Mandler cites studies showing the effects of story schemata on recall but claims further that there is beginning to be a collection of evidence that the schema affects the mental activity of the reading process itself. She cites a study of the reading of multi-episode stories which found that subjects took longer to read sentences at the boundaries of episodes. (53) This study was then expanded by Mandler and Goodman in 1982 to include consideration of reading times over other major elements of a story, not just episodes (they included such constituents of a story as settings, beginnings, complex reactions, attempts, outcomes and endings).

> Each of these smaller constituents can be considered a kind of local topic unit in the larger macrostructure of a story. When a boundary between units is reached, the reader knows that the story line is moving ahead and that the next topic has begun. Thus, readers can use their knowledge of story structure to recognize and categorize sentences into their relevant topics. This knowledge is not purely top-down, or schema-driven; as in all processing it must interact with the particulars of the incoming information. Since stories vary widely in how elaborately each unit is told, the reader does not necessarily know that a given unit has finished until the next has begun. When the topic shifts, however, the reader can discern that the former unit is finished. It was hypothesized that reading times would slow down at this point, as the reader formulates a macroproposition corresponding to the previous unit and begins to formulate the content of the next. The story schema thus enables the reader to form a coherent representation of the story as a whole. The bridging information that connects the units is supplied by the schema, and does not have to be built up afresh, as presumably must be done when reading unfamiliar types of prose. (Mandler, 1984, 53 - 54)

In practice, readers did indeed slow down at these boundary points. Among other follow-up tests, Mandler and Goodman removed their sentences from the story and supplied them to readers as simple pairs of sentences. When the sentences were removed from the stories, the effects of the boundaries disappeared and reading speed was normal; the pattern of slower processing at boundaries was a function of the story structure. Mandler is quite categorical about the results:

> These results provide clear evidence for the psychological validity of the constituents posited by the story grammar, in the sense that they have been show [*sic*] to affect the rate at which stories are understood and recalled. The effects are clearly structural; story constituents have boundaries at which processing is different from that occurring in the interior of these units. (1984, 57)

It seems to me that a disruption of an expectation evoked by a schema, whether general or literary, could be one kind of trigger that would shut off automaticity. The reader of the story about the London detective evoked by LaBerge and Samuels above has a sufficient framework for expectations about the book. General schemata about London, about the kinds of detectives that work in London within the parameters of a familiar kind of mystery, about other significant details, mingle with, merge into, and separate from a distinct story schema that is just as comfortable as the nine-year-old's expectations about the Famous Five. No wonder everything runs on automatic. There may be a longer processing stage at boundary divisions but since that is to be expected it is not enough to break the trance. The reader knows that is how you read such stories.

It is important to remember, however, that readers develop their schemata from their experiences, from their practice. Ian Reid has drawn attention to the perils of teachers or theorists trying to impose limits on the nature and quantity of children's story schemata:

> [T]here is still in some quarters an insistence that the young need to stick to single formulaic texts. . . . I contend on the contrary that we should firmly reject the narrow concept of storyness inshrined in some linguistic theories and some reading textbooks, evident for example in the statement that comprehension depends on adherence to a basic "schema" in which "there must be a proper ending with nothing left unexplained" (Kintsch 1979: 130 - 33 . . .). To obey that pernicious nonsense would be to censor Tomi Ungerer's *I'm Papa Snap and these are my Favorite No Such Stories*, to say nothing of the bizarre extravaganzas of Edward Gorey or Spike Milligan, and many other texts in which children's imaginations take delight. The "child's concept of story" can be much more supple than is recognised in Arthur Applebee's book of that name (Applebee 1978). As for the so-called narrative schema, with its dreadfully dull routine of orientation/complication/resolution, it is an impoverished extratextual notion posing as an inherent textual quintessence, and is quite blind to the importance of circumtextual, intratextual and intertextual framing elements. (1992, 66)

Reid's warning is an important one, but he is in serious danger of confusing two issues. By complaining about texts and theories that talk about *teaching* specific story schemata, he does not pay due attention to the kinds of nebulous schemata which children develop from their own experiences of narrative--experiences which include television cartoons, Nintendo games, and many other forms of conventionalised story sequence. A teacher might confuse a child so equipped with expectations based on previous experiences, but he or she could hardly expect to eliminate those assumptions of the child which do not bear the classroom seal of approval.

Nevertheless, Reid is right to warn against the reductive assumptions which can so easily creep into schema theory. Mandler's research showed readers slowing down at predictable boundary units. She does not provide equivalent research exploring how readers behave when they are surprised. Her work reveals some of the activity which underpins the way we deal with material we already understand, but it does not pretend to investigate how we might acquire *new* schemata, nor does it provide any evidence one way or another about whether readers' schemata alter as cultures change. Certainly the story schemata of small children who have read a large number of contemporary picture books might well be more wide-ranging and flexible than those of readers whose experiences have been more traditional (see Mackey 1993b).

The most coherent explanation of the working of story schemata is the suggestion that readers accumulate a collection of tacit schemata out of their own experiences; these may be supplemented by direct instruction, though it is open to question how effective such instruction may be. If readers grow up with a variety of fiction formats, if their early reading experiences include the kind of play with conventions which is now quite common in children's picture books, if, in short, their experience is more postmodern than what we conventionally label conventional, then presumably their schema equipment is going to be differently composed from that of those who grew up in a more sedate world of fictional options. Once again, we are back to Iran-Nejad's shifting schema metaphor. There is a danger in schema theory of applying one set of schemata too widely.

However, even if the details fall out differently, I do not see that the idea of a story schema is deficient because different people, or different generations, build up different schemata. What is important is to remain tentative, not to apply one person's experience to another's.

On the other hand, the acquired schemata will undeniably affect how new information is processed and stored by the reader. Branigan describes this activity:

> Information from a text is sorted and measured by a schema against other kinds of knowledge base. The result is that certain information in a narrative is elaborately processed and assigned to a hierarchy in working memory according to relative importance while much else is discarded. The "value" of information increases according to its *im*probability so that typical and probable elements--so-called "unmarked" elements of a paradigm--carry the least amount of information. The more typical the information is for a perceiver, the less well it is recalled for it is already implicit in a guiding schema. Events in a text are therefore marked as salient and acquire special significance because of expectations defined by the internal order of a schema. (1992, 15)

Finally, there is the importance of affect in the activation of schemata. Wolfgang Iser suggests that emotions cannot be eliminated, even in this kind of cognitive activity:

> There is no text that does not contain a discernible number of inherited schemata. . . . The schemata of the literary texts generally do not imitate a given empirical world of objects; instead they reproduce affective attitudes, memories, knowledge, mental and perceptual dispositions, and so on, whose amalgamation, however, is not brought about for its own sake. It goes without saying that the affective and cognitive dispositions that are called upon during this process comprise data drawn from the external world, and these are incorporated into the schema, supplying it with its components of accommodation. But in literature such an imitation always serves the assimilative function, whose aim is so to symbolize the absent, the unavailable, the ungraspable that they may become accessible. (1993, 254)

According to Bartlett, our memory schemata are under the control of affective attitudes. Bruner explains this as follows:

> In the actual effort to remember something, he notes, what most often comes first to mind is an affect or a charged "attitude"--that "it" was something unpleasant, something that led to embarrassment, something that was exciting.

> The affect is rather like a general thumbprint of the schema to be reconstructed. "The recall is then a construction made largely on the basis of this attitude, and its general effect is that of a justification of the attitude." [no page reference in Bruner] Remembering serves, on this view, to justify an affect, an attitude. The act of recall is "loaded," then, fulfilling a "rhetorical" function in the process of reconstructing the past. It is a reconstruction designed to justify. (1990, 58)

Bruner then goes one step further.

> We are not only trying to convince ourselves with our memory reconstructions. Recalling the past also serves a dialogic function. The rememberer's interlocutor (whether present in the flesh or in the abstract form of a reference group) exerts a subtle but steady pressure. That is surely the brunt of Bartlett's own brilliant experiments on serial reproduction, in which an initially culturally alien Amerindian tale comes out culturally conventionalized when passed in succession from one Cambridge undergraduate to another. In Bartlett's phrase, we create "sympathetic weather" in our memory reconstructions. But it is sympathetic weather not only for ourselves but for our interlocutors. (1990, 59)

When Bruner refers to the abstract interlocutor, existing in the reader's mind as a reference group, the links with the internalised community of interpreters are not hard to see.

What is the significance of all this discussion of memory on an analysis of the reading process? There are a number of answers to this question. David Gelernter (1994) has posited the importance to our thinking processes of what he calls the affect link, the association of thoughts which share the same emotional content. Some emotional tones are vivid and powerful, some subtle and nuanced, but in our less focused forms of thinking we make associations on the basis of affective content, he says. It is not difficult to see the implications of this suggestion for the reading of fiction: if we draw on our own experiences to help us to make sense of a text (especially, but not necessarily, a fictional or poetic text), the importance of affect in helping us to make associations can be substantial.

Memory and affect are also involved in issues of tellability. If our requirement and our assumption is that a story will turn out to be worth the telling (and, to some extent, this is an affective decision), a number of factors come into play. If we can be convinced that it is worth the effort, we will be patient at the beginning and wait for adequate information to be woven into the text, fill in gaps as we go along, make retrospective wrap-ups invoking a trust in the rules of coherence, reinterpret until we have a story that satisfies us. And if we do not take every step automatically, we automatize as much as we can and direct our attention economically. As Bruner suggests, we do all this in culturally conditioned ways, banking our ideas off an internalized abstract reference group which we have been accumulating since we began to take in the world around us. The fact that in twentieth century Western culture we may be more open-minded about cultural forms does not invalidate the argument; it merely points out that twentieth century Western culture *includes* a norm of cultural pluralism and relativism, conditioned by many features of contemporary life such as access to remote cultures by both anthropologists and television crews.

In any case, before all this elaborate apparatus of memory and assumption is brought to bear, we must be persuaded to *engage.* It seems plausible to me that this affective engagement (which need not be whole-hearted or submissive to operate successfully) may be a crucial element in the initial stages of reading a text.

Inference and interpretation

Schemata play a role in the development of inference. Rumelhart explains one feature of this:

> We need not observe all aspects of a situation before we are willing to assume that some particular configuration of schemata offers a satisfactory account for that situation. Once we have accepted a configuration of schemata, the schemata themselves provide a richness that goes far beyond our observations. On deciding that we have seen an automobile, we assume that it has an engine, headlights, and all of the standard characteristics of an automobile. We do this without the slightest hesitation. We have complete confidence in our little theory. This allows our interpretations to far outstrip our sensory observations. In fact, once we have determined that a particular schema accounts for some event, we may not be able to determine which aspects of our beliefs are based on direct sensory information and which are merely consequences of our interpretation. (1980, 38)

The default values in a schema of a car--engine, headlights, etc.--are not open to major debate. A rural African's schema for car might include some doubt about reliability of tires, based on years of experience of problems with spare parts. North Americans and Europeans would probably not quarrel greatly with each other's schema except for a possible quibble about the position of the steering wheel. Bronwyn Mellor, Marnie O'Neill and Annette Patterson, however, present a case where the complacency of shared schemata causes reading problems. They talk about the kind of question which once seemed like a breakthrough for engaging the readers with the text: instead of just dealing with dry factual questioning about details actually printed in the text, students have been taught to make inferences about characters, settings, and so forth. Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson describe two groups who read a poem by Edgar Lee Masters. These students added numerous details to flesh out a character mentioned briefly by Masters.

> Having been asked by their teacher after a period of discussion to underline the textual references in the poem to each character, the students were reminded of their readings of the character of, firstly, Mrs Greene and asked where their readings had "come from". The students began to re-state their readings, prefacing many of their comments with such phrases as, "It's obvious that..."; "You can see that she would..."; "It's typical of bored, rich women to..." and so on. When pressed further to account for the production of such detailed readings from so little textual information they offered general explanations such as "expectations formed by other similar stories"; "from experience of life"; "personal experience" and "reading between the lines" and even, in a confident denial of the validity of readings other than their own,

> "it's obvious from the clues that are given".
>
> Such assertions as these by students--that their readings are both personal and inferential--have caused us to query the assumptions of the second question with which we began this article: "What kind of person, do you think, the (main) character is?" We hadn't asked the students the question but, then, we hadn't needed to. The students, it appears, have already learned a reading practice that encourages the filling of textual gaps so completely that they are unaware of them and their operation as readers. They have been taught to feel that they are finding a meaning that is there in the text, while also bringing to the reading their own personal experience. Interestingly, a reading that focuses on the question (in this case not explicitly asked) of what kind of people Elsa Wertman, Thomas and Mrs Greene are, appears both to conceal gaps in the text and make the reading process curiously invisible. While avoiding the production of a reading that seems merely to "sift the surface" of the poem, growth model reading practices--implicit in a focus which emphasises personal, empathic response--produce readers who are unaware of the ways in which they operate to construct meanings and who, thus, are unable to "read" not only the terms of their own readings but those of others as well. (1991, 64 - 65)

Some inferences, such as how John behaved between getting out of bed and arriving at the airport, are not terribly important. Not every gap in the text causes problems. And some gaps are impossible to fill with certainty. What actually did happen between Tess and Alec d'Urberville in the woods? Did he rape her? Did she consent, and, if so, was it whole- or half-hearted? We will never know, and no amount of inference will tell us. We must read the text with that gap preserved. (Whether Hardy chose to leave this gap out of pure aesthetic subtlety or was forced into it by social pressures of his day is an interesting question but one that can only affect our reading of the text tangentially; we must read the text we have. Whatever his motives, we still have the gap.) What Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson are dealing with above is a false sense of certainty, a dubious richness, an inability to leave a gap alone without inferring, in the case they describe, a very stock response.

No text provides every detail; a certain amount of inference is essential to make sense of any text. Lennard Davis argues that by automatically inferring the quotidian detail lacking in any text, we saturate a story with our own ideology. Yet a reflective, metafictive reading, constantly inspecting the ideology at work in the text, reduces automaticity and may, for that reason alone, often be difficult to sustain.

Inference is a two-edged sword, in other words, like so many aspects of reading. It may also be that readers get habituated to dismissing some inferences as well. If I read a book by Dorothy Sayers I know there are going to be throw-away scraps of anti-Semitism and, although I find them distasteful, they now barely throw me off my stride. Am I being ideologically perverted in the cause of automaticity? I never take her asides on Jews for granted, but, because I already know they are there, I discount them in a way that feels automatic.

As with the problems that arise over uses of the word *schema*, there are complications in our use of the word *gaps*. For Iser, a gap in a text represents a place for the reader to stand.

> The text is a whole system of such processes, and so, clearly, there must be a place within this system for the person who is to perform the reconstituting. This place is marked by the gaps in the text--it consists in the blanks which the reader is to fill in. They cannot, of course, be filled in by the system itself, and so it follows that they can only be filled in by another system. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. Hence the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text. (1978, 169)

There are others, however, who question Iser's assumption that gap-filling occurs "on terms set by the text." The whole issue of resistant reading challenges what might be described as Iser's complacency here. Bronwyn Mellor, Marnie O'Neill and Annette Patterson, for example, describe a teaching process that deals with gaps in a very different way:

> What then might be beginning points when preparing to study a text from recent literary critical positions? In planning the study of a text, we now attempt to design work which will:
> * emphasise the "constructedness" of a text
> * highlight the plurality of a text's meanings and the possibility of multiple readings
> * foreground the "already read" nature of possible readings of a text and make them available for analysis
> * foreground what is involved in the construction of one reading over others
> * make the gaps in texts and readings visible and available for analysis
> * foreground the ways in which texts attempt to position readers
> * make it possible to analyze ways in which texts might activate particular readings
> * draw attention to the naturalising tendencies of texts and readings
> * disrupt the apparent neutrality and naturalness of texts and readings and make contradiction available for analysis (1992, 50 - 51)

Insofar as any single phrase can do justice to this complex and challenging list, "suspicion of inference" might come as close as any. Presumably the three authors would also be fairly suspicious of any form of automaticity; certainly their approach to teaching sets out to reduce, if not eliminate, many elements of automatic processing of text. They want to question every aspect of how the text attempts to engage the reader. This, of course, is a prospectus for teaching; and Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson have rather less to say about how much of this approach might or should carry over into private, leisure reading. They also do not address the issue of how much of such challenging can go on during a single reading, especially a first reading of a text. While their questions are fascinating, they seem to me to be talking to some extent about post-reading activity.

Perhaps Stibbs's metaphor about the amphibian alternating confidently between air and water may be useful again here. Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson certainly seem to assume in their list of reading criteria that the initial phase of learning to float has been so well mastered that it needs no further attention. They are emphatically dealing with refinements of stroke, breathing, leg movement and so on. I am not arguing against the need for such attention; in a world where what we read can be used to sell to us, to deceive us, to placate us and to domesticate us, there is clearly a need and a duty to turn readers into the strongest possible swimmers. What I do suggest is that this kind of suspicious reading is only part of the story.

In leisure or ludic reading, where a rigorous questioning approach is unlikely, the criterion of "good enough" is far more likely to prevail; the schema with its unreflective default values is more likely to be important. And the default values which often govern our inferences can be laid in place very early. Howard Gardner has devoted an entire book to the idea that the ideas we form when young, even when they are misconceived, are surprisingly long-lived and resilient:

> It is my belief that, until recently, those of us involved in education have not appreciated the strength of the initial conceptions, stereotypes, and "scripts" that students bring to their school learning nor the difficulty of refashioning or eradicating them. We have failed to appreciate that *in nearly every student there is a five-year-old "unschooled" mind struggling to get out and express itself.* (1991, 5)

Charles Sarland might not dispute the strength of initial conceptions but he might argue with the cut-off point of five years of age. Sarland makes the case that young people go on establishing preliminary ideas into adolescence, especially as they attempt to understand nuances of adult relationships which are of less interest to small children. Gardner's work explores the kind of understandings that schools emphasise; Sarland is talking more about cultural understandings. He mentions the stereotyped social relationships described in much popular fiction:

> I wish to explore a little further the representative nature of the social relationships. . . . I would argue that such generalizations are of vital importance to adolescents learning about adult relationships. Popular fiction constructs generalities, values, and views of relationships which the young can use in order to begin to understand the world and their place in it. (1991, 67)

In a presentation at the 1989 International Conference on Reading and Response at the University of East Anglia, Sarland, in effect, gave the case for the defence against the complaints of Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson, concerning the unjustified inferences created out of stock responses to the poem by Edgar Lee Masters. Stock responses to literature may be inadequate, he said, but this does not mean they are ill-thought-out. As an adolescent he had battled long and hard to achieve the kinds of conventional understandings which his culture supported. Even a stock response requires background knowledge. We may wish to encourage more subtle understandings, but we should acknowledge that a stereotype represents one kind of attempt to categorise experience.

In the book which arose out of his dissertation, Sarland points out that popular culture supplies a large number of the references we use in order to make our categories:

> Young people, in the negotiation of their own individual courses through the culture, need some signposts against which to chart their own directions. "Marriage", "love", "normal sexuality", "normal relationships," "right", "wrong", "order", "chaos", are all cultural constructs. If we want to know how such

> categories are currently constructed by the culture, then the first place to go will be the primary means of cultural communication--the popular arts: television, video and popular literature. (1991, 68)

In other words there are many sources of inference, including childhood experience and readily accessible popular culture. Some of these provide assumptions that are far from intellectually rigorous. Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson give an example of how readers can go actively wrong in their interpretation by invoking the stereotypes they have accumulated over the years. It seems to me that Sarland is right to give young readers credit for the mental achievement of collecting workable stereotypes, but their lives will be limited if they do not move beyond them.

Howard Gardner talks about the need to teach children in ways that take account of their accumulated stereotypes.

> To the extent that what they are taught is consistent with canonical sets of events, that material will be readily assimilated, but to the extent that newly encountered sequences of events clash with well-entrenched scripts, children may distort them or have difficulty in assimilating them. Thus, if children are accustomed to scripts that feature "good guys," "bad guys," a chase and a happy ending, they will tend to interpret historical events like a civil war or literary texts like *Oliver Twist* along these lines, and they may well reduce more complex scripts to these sound-bite capsules of reality.
>
> As a result of daily experiences and of media presentations, children also develop robust images of kinds of characters and personalities. Such stereotypes may be quite positive or neutral (the mother as a warm and loving person, the policeman as someone who offers protection), but they may also contain misleading assumptions (all doctors are male, all nurses are female) or generalizations that are false and even dangerous (all Jewish men are smart or crooked, all black men are strong or prone to violence). (1991, 99)

Learning will be most successful, he says, when these stereotypes are acknowledged and children are given the chance to explore alternatives for themselves. Otherwise, stock ideas linger:

> Children carry around in their consciousness a large number of scripts, stereotypes, models, and beliefs. Examined analytically, these conceptual schemas may harbor many internal contradictions. . . . Rarely, however, are these contradictions noted, and even when they are, they rarely trouble the child. I would suggest, further, that adults carry about with them a similar set of conflicting statements and sentiments (for example, in the political sphere) whose contradictory nature rarely proves troublesome in everyday life. (1991, 101)

Some of the complex issues involved in this question can be clarified if we distinguish between passive and active forms of inference. Calling on default values of schemata to fill out the sketchy details supplied by the author (what Kendall Walton calls supplementation) can be distinguished from the strenuous collection of hints and clues that go to make up the active guessing game that makes up some kinds of reading. Mellor, Patterson and O'Neill are perhaps complaining that their students produced one kind of filling-in response when the other was more appropriate to the text. Certainly the whole process of making inferences also involves, however subliminally, the need to make decisions about what quality of inferencing is required.

Furthermore, the basis of any inference may be remarkably slippery. Walton says that readers may not care about this:

> Readers of a novel may be struck powerfully by a character's determination or insecurity or optimism without being able to say, or caring, what fictional truths concerning his actions or words or others' comments about him are responsible for it. Even close inspection of a painting may fail to reveal which fictional truths about the lay of a person's face imply fictional truths, themselves utterly obvious, about his expression or mood--or indeed whether the latter are implied by the former at all rather than generated in some other way. It is clearly misleading to say that, in general, appreciators *infer* implied fictional truths from those on which they are based. Sometimes the very indirectness of its generation gives a fictional truth prominence, especially when it would be easy to generate it more directly; a little coyness in constructing representations, here as elsewhere, whets the appetite and focuses attention. (1990, 143)

Wrap-up and closure

Wolfgang Iser draws our attention to the crucial importance of the time element in reading:

> In our attempts to describe the intersubjective structure of the process through which a text is transferred and translated, our first problem is the fact that the whole text can never be perceived at any one time. In this respect it differs from given objects, which can generally be viewed or at least conceived as a whole. The "object" of the text can only be imagined by way of different consecutive phases of reading. We always stand outside the given object, whereas we are situated inside the literary text. The relation between text and reader is therefore quite different from that between object and observer: instead of a subject-object relationship, there is a moving viewpoint which travels along *inside* that which it has to apprehend. This mode of grasping an object is unique to literature. (1978, 108 - 109)

Dealing with partial information over a period of time, and trying to process it without access to the whole picture presents challenges to the brain. As information is passed through the short-term memory and into the working and long-term memories, it must be chunked somehow in order to be manageable. The capacity limitation on the short-term memory is quite strict and there must be grouping of data in order to deal with the quantities of input provided by any text. Some of this grouping takes place at the end of sentences, as the mind attempts to chunk the individual ingredients.

Just and Carpenter describe this process as one of wrap-up:

> The processes that occur during sentence wrap-up involve a search for

> referents that have not been assigned, the construction of interclause relations (with the aid of inferences if necessary), and an attempt to handle any inconsistencies that could not be resolved within the sentence. (1985, 196)

A sentence, of course, is clearly marked as a unit, by punctuation, spacing, and subsequent capital letter. The brain can deal with this recognition automatically. Wrap-up also occurs, however, at the end of larger units and these may not be so readily recognised at first glance.

The process of wrap-up also accounts, at least partially, for an aspect of reading that gets less attention than it deserves: the issue of forgetting. Wrap-up involves the integration of content with previous material, and there is room for some unstressed information to disappear. Just and Carpenter comment:

> Integration can also lead to forgetting in working memory. As each new chunk is formed, there is a possibility that it will displace some previous information from working memory. Particularly vulnerable are items that are only marginally activated, usually because they were processed much earlier and have not recently participated in a production. (1985, 194)

Schemata, inferences, and interpretations all play a role in what is remembered and what is not, as Branigan points out:

> One of the most important yet least appreciated facts about narrative is that perceivers tend to *remember* a story in terms of *categories of information stated as propositions, interpretations, and summaries* rather than remembering the way the story is actually presented or its surface features. It requires great effort to recall the exact words used in a novel or the exact sequence of shorts, angles, lighting, etc. used in a film. The reason is that features of the "surface structure" of texts are typically stored only by recency in so-called "push-down" stacks where new elements are continually being added at the boundary, pushing the older elements farther away. When we say that we remember a film, we do not normally mean that we remember the angle from which it was viewed in the movie theater, or the exact angles assumed by the cameras in a scene. Rather, when we speak of comprehending something, we mean that our knowledge of it may be stated in several equivalent ways; our knowledge has achieved a certain independence from initial stimuli. (1992, 14 - 15)

In other words, we chunk according to what seems salient by criteria which we may apply from a number of sources. In achieving this independence from the initial stimulus, however, we may well lose precision of recall of detail.

There are literary implications to such a process. At one level, it is easy to observe a text tactician like Agatha Christie making clever use of the vulnerability of marginally activated items in order to bury a clue that later turns out to be important. At a loftier level, Frank Kermode mentions the role of forgetting in higher levels of criticism:

> Modern critical theory occasionally remembers to mention forgetfulness; to put it at its lowest, it is a great aid to interpretation, whether the writer's or

> the reader's. . . . To be blessedly fallible, to have the capacity to subvert manifest senses, is the mark of good enough readers and good enough texts. (1979, 14)

I.A. Richards looks at the flip-side of what makes a reading "good enough." First he talks about F.W. Whitehead's discussion of essential omission:

> In all reading we *abstract*, we take only some of the possibilities of the words' meanings into account. No matter how concrete the topic or its treatment seems to be, we are abstracting, we are leaving out some of the possibilities. . . . [I]n all reading whatsoever much must be left out. Otherwise we could arrive at no meaning. (1942, 93)

In other words, if we try to explore every implication of every word given in a text we will not be able to construct any coherent understanding because words are too slippery and ambiguous. However, *how* we abstract, what we decide to chunk in the working memory and what gets lost by the wayside is highly important.

> Most misreading--and here Whitehead's point about essential omission is all-important--comes from faulty abstraction. We abstract all the time, but not skillfully enough. The universals which result from abstraction are insufficiently stable, or insufficiently flexible--too fluid, or rigid in the wrong directions. (1942, 108)

Clearly the process of wrap-up as one way in which we prepare text for memory storage is not a neutral or a passive process; issues of emphasis, of balance and of relationship are decided at this stage, and our decisions may be more or less useful. Since, by definition, much of this activity occurs as part of an uncompleted process, many judgement calls must be made, sometimes on a basis of insufficient information. This is one way in which reading is an active process.

Wrap-up also occurs at the boundaries of units larger than sentences. As already mentioned, Mandler observed the slower reading which took place at boundaries between structures within the story schema, and remarked that not all kinds of unit are as clearly marked as the sentence with its typographical cues. Sometimes, the reader realizes that a stage has been passed only in retrospect, and the wrap-up occurs retroactively. Rabinowitz in his description of the rules of notice observes that endings and beginnings are privileged positions, and that an item placed at the end of a unit will receive extra attention. The endings of paragraphs, chapters, whole sections of books may mark points for wrap-up.

Rowell, Moss and Pope discuss the creation of artificial boundaries in the division of a text into units for study, and the kinds of impact this can have on comprehension. They did a study of different ways to assign the reading of *Animal Farm*, and explored the implications:

> In the school situation reading instructions frequently can be categorised as variants of one of two general strategies:
>
> (i) reading the book in sections, usually with teacher guidance, building toward an understanding of the whole. We shall call this the part-book strategy. It corresponds with the likelihood of frequent wrap up, and a

> concomitantly detailed representation of events and meaning construction based on them;
>
> (ii) reading the whole book without teacher intervention, possibly with subsequent reflection on sections of it. We shall call this the whole-book strategy. It corresponds to relatively infrequent wrap up, reading for gist and a potentially restricted comprehension and appreciation of a tale. (1990, 44)

Assigning *Animal Farm* to different groups to be read according to these two strategies, the authors found that there were indeed differences in understanding and recall which could be accounted for by the special emphasis placed on information that came at or near the end of a segment. Their results are quite complicated and difficult to summarize, but they did find differences in the interpretation of the ambiguous character of Snowball which appeared to be accounted for by difference in reading strategy. A remark on Snowball's character appeared at the end of a segment in the part-book reading, and those readers paid greater attention to it, presumably as part of their wrap-up strategy. I found a similar effect of segmentation in the project I did for my Master's thesis; segmentation artificially highlighted a symbol in the story which every reader then noticed. (Mackey 1991) Rowell *et al.* comment on the importance of this finding.

> In summary, a difference in reading instructions of the kind we have named whole- and part-book *can* result in different internal representations of a story, and therefore impose correspondingly different constraints on the construction of possible meanings. (1990, 53)

It need not take a teacher's instruction to affect a reading practice. All kinds of reading situations may impinge on the outcome. A book read in a single sitting is a different experience from a reading spread over many short episodes, all the more so if the intermittent reader ponders the unanswered questions in the intervals between reading, discusses the book with others, or, instead, forgets important details. Serial publication in the nineteenth century is only one extreme example of the manipulation of pauses and wrap-up requirements. Any segmentation of a reading seems almost bound to have some impact on how the text is read--as does no segmentation.

Wrap-up is a good example of a discourse process, though convention is almost certainly also called in aid in the creation of usable "chunks." It seems to me that exploring this kind of fine-tuning of the reading process is as important as the apparently larger questions of inference and assumption; each feeds the other.

Discourse analysis, cohesion, word choice and redundancy

If we use boundaries as wrap-up points, thus affecting our interpretations of stories, then we must have ways of making connections between units. A text must hang together across sentence boundaries, and indeed across structural boundaries as outlined in story schemata. There must be something which makes such a text a unit rather than a collection of discrete and unrelated fragments. Sentences in a text must be connected and inter-related and an important tool which achieves this end is cohesion.

John Chapman provides this definition of textual cohesion:

> Cohesion is said to be the means whereby items in a text, that are not otherwise accounted for by structural (that is basically syntactical) analysis, are linked together through their interdependence on one another for their interpretation. In other words, it is suggested that the meaning of one element, a word, a phrase, a clause or even a whole paragraph in a book cannot be totally understood in isolation. To be cohesive any one particular element has to be related to another for complete understanding. (1987, 22)

The term for a pair of cohesively linked items is cohesive tie, and there are several kinds of them, as Chapman outlines:

> Cohesive ties can be arranged in five groupings: *reference* (pronouns like "I", "me", "you", as well as "this" and "that"); *substitution* (e.g. the words, "one", "do", "same", "did it") and *ellipsis* (where the word or words are not physically present on the page but are understood from the previous context by the listener or reader); *conjunction* (for example, the "and", "but", "then" and "so" words) and *lexical cohesion* (which arises through the author's choice of vocabulary). These original five have been reduced to four, substitution being subsumed by ellipsis. (1987, 22 - 23)

Of these categories, reference, substitution/ellipsis and conjunction are strictly organizational tools: ways to avoid endless repetition and reiteration, to link ideas through a series of sentences and paragraphs, to make progress. Reference adds the complexity of deixis and the relationship between writer and reader (who actually *is* the "I" when a reader reads another's writing?); ellipsis may bring us back to gaps in the text and John's behaviour on the way to the airport, to revert to Chatman's example of how we assume conventional behaviour unless told otherwise. For the moment, however, it will be most useful to concentrate on lexical cohesion.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), lexical cohesion is at work not simply when a content word is repeated but also when a synonym or synonymous phrase is used instead. Morgan and Sellner dispute whether this is a *linguistic* distinction or whether it is a mere "epiphenomenon of content coherence."(1980, 179) For the reader, it probably doesn't matter very much. Devotees of the Hardy Boys books will always know that it is Aunt Gertrude who is being described as "a tall angular maiden lady of uncertain years," and whether this is a question of description, apposition, or lexical cohesion, there is no doubt that readers make use of such substitutes when building up connectedness in their reading of a passage. Constant periphrasis can be wearying rather than helpful but it causes the reader to behave in certain ways and make certain connections.

Philip Pullman, describing his own writing of a passage, outlines a different kind of relationship between words, almost a sort of cohesion by seepage.

> [T]wo other words were put in deliberately in the hope that their meaning would leak out of the grammatical context and, in effect, allow the words to be misread.
>
> One is *steel*. The colour of an engraving is the same whether it's made of steel or copper; but steel is grey and copper isn't, and I wanted to reinforce

> the grey colour I'd already suggested. Besides, *steel* has connotations of sharp blades and danger. The other word, *transfixed*, in context can refer to nothing but the lump of opium. But we don't read stories so carefully that we always get that sort of thing right. We read swiftly and impressionistically, taking in chunks and patches of text at once; we half see things, we absorb the associations of words and assimilate them unconsciously into what's around them. I came across this in my own reading. Sometimes when going back to see whether a passage had really said what I thought it had, I would find that I'd seen a word correctly but that its meaning had leaked into another swiftly seen phrase, a different sentence, a wrong context. So now I apply that principle deliberately when I write. The word *transfixed* can also mean intent, motionless, hypnotized, just as the sailor is hypnotized by what the girl is doing: so the meaning of the word leaks out to suggest the sailor, watching. This principle of leakage, of planting words to be half seen out of the corner of the eye and fruitfully misread, is one I've found extremely powerful. When you look attentively at the passage, you can't see the picture at all, but it is there when you read quickly, by a sort of optical illusion. (1989, 177)

Pullman is describing something far more subtle than the nature of synonymity. When words are used, it is often not simply for their coherence or cohesiveness; they are often chosen for their polysemic contribution to the text's richness of association and insinuation. We have already seen some of the possibility of this approach in Perfetti's observation that all the meanings of a word may be initially activated; it is easy to see how an ambiguous or double-sided meaning might not entirely fade away.

Alongside the value of avoiding wearisome repetition and the virtue of the single word chosen for the richness of its associations, we must consider the sometimes contradictory importance of redundancy in a text. A text may supply redundancy in many ways: in choice of words, in re-telling of vital points, in expanding on the terseness of a single descriptive phrase. It can be a crucial element at the level of plot and character as well; Umberto Eco has drawn our attention to one reason for the success of popular narrative: its emphasis on redundancy:

> If we examine the iterative scheme from a structural point of view, we realize that we are in the presence of a typical *high-redundance message*. A novel by Souvestre and Allain or by Rex Stout is a message which informs us very little and which, on the contrary, thanks to the use of redundant elements, keeps hammering away at the same meaning which we have peacefully acquired upon reading the first work of the series. . . . The taste for the iterative scheme is presented then as a taste for redundance. The hunger for entertaining narrative based on these mechanisms is a *hunger for redundance*. From this viewpoint, the greater part of popular narrative is a narrative of redundance.
>
> Paradoxically, the same detective story that one is tempted to ascribe to the products that satisfy the taste for the unforeseen or the sensational is, in fact, read for exactly the opposite reason, as an invitation to that which is taken for granted, familiar, expected. (1981, 120)

So far in this section, we have been talking about choices made by the writer rather than the behaviour of the reader. Readers' responses will probably not automatically run along all the paths envisaged by the writer, but the writer's success in both clarity and evocation may impinge on the reading at one level of consciousness or another. Readers will probably never take in that a writer may be enticing them into fruitful misreading by association. The whole idea of such seepage contradicts some narrow definitions of successful reading in any case; but the power of Pullman's argument cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Again in this kind of analysis, we are looking at the fine-grain work of reading. Wolfgang Iser looks at a wider application of the idea of making linkages throughout a text, supplying us with the useful phrase, "consistency-building."

> Consistency-building is the indispensable basis for all acts of comprehension, and this in its turn is dependent upon processes of selection. This basic structure is exploited by literary texts in such a way that the reader's imagination can be manipulated and even reoriented. (1978, 125)

Iser quotes Water Pater's 1920 book, *Appreciations*:

> For to the grave reader words too are grave; and the ornamental word, the figure, the accessory form or color or reference is rarely content to die to thought precisely at the right moment, but will inevitably linger awhile, stirring a long 'brainwave' behind it of perhaps quite alien associations. (18 in Pater, 126 in Iser)

Iser concludes,

> Thus consistency-building brings in its wake all those elements that cannot be integrated into the gestalt of the moment. Even in the background-foreground dialectic of the wandering viewpoint, we saw that the interaction and interrelation of textual perspectives leads inevitably to selections in favor of specific connections, for this is the only way in which gestalten can be formed. But selection automatically involves exclusion, and that which has been excluded remains on the fringes as a potential range of connections. (1978, 126)

Iser thus reinforces the complexity of elements at work in a reading act which takes place over time; simple cohesion is probably the least of the forces at work as the reader makes some sort of satisfactory sense of an elaborate text.

It is quite possible that elements of the reading process, which appear opposed on first glance, may actually work together in subtle ways. I.A. Richards' readers, for example, abstracting the essential meaning from a plethora of possibilities in the words of the text before them, may actually find that residual meanings are not quite thoroughly abandoned, that resonances linger from the alternative interpretations which were apparently dismissed. Any description of reading must allow for paradox and contradiction.

Repertoire, intertext, and contrast

All writing is grounded in some form of social understanding. Even the most revolutionary writing which rejects all previous conventions must create ways for readers to find out what is happening in the text. The match between the background knowledge which the text calls for and that which the reader actually supplies may sometimes be limited or inadequate, and that kind of gap may interfere with meaningful reading.

The writer, choosing the words for the story from an unlimited set, is the one with the relative freedom to establish what kinds of background understandings are called for--though writers themselves, of course, are constrained by the limits of understanding in their own societies. The reader must try to establish what the writer is calling for, but it is naive to assume that many readers will supply a completely compatible background. Some misunderstandings may interfere with the processing of the text as a whole, but many more are simply lived with, muddled through, compensated for, overlooked, ignored, or forgotten.

The repertoire includes not only understandings about social conventions but also understandings about how to approach particular kinds of text. Obviously the reader's own general background knowledge and historical understanding may supply a great deal of what is needed, but experience with other texts also plays a profound role in the establishment and application of a repertoire. These texts need not be literary; we live in a society full of multiple forms of text and most readers apply experience from other media to their approaches to reading.

Charles Sarland, summing up his research with young readers and popular titles, has this to say:

> The text brings with it a *repertoire*, references to historical knowledge, previous texts, culture: the real reader, too, has a repertoire which may or may not match the repertoire of the text. This repertoire of the text is unwritten. It is a set of assumptions about culture, about general knowledge, about common sense, that underlies the text. The text has a series of "blanks", the parameters of which determine the nature of these assumptions. In order to appreciate the text the real reader has to fit her or his repertoire to the blanks in the text. It is quite clear, for instance, that the readers . . . who failed to appreciate *The Pearl* brought a different repertoire to the text from that apparently required by Steinbeck. And it is also quite clear, in the discussion of *Stranger with my Face*, [by Lois Duncan] that the repertoire of the readers almost perfectly matched that of the text. (1991, 140 - 141)

The whole argument about cultural literacy involves the development of a "classical" repertoire which theoretically enables readers to make sense out of texts from previous eras. Patrick Dias, however, suggests that things are not so simple.

> My experience is otherwise. Far more powerful than being equipped . . . with an adequate data base, is the reader's expectation that a text will make sense. Readers who expect that text is meaningful will make every effort to make some sense of that text. (1992, 13)

Dias says that an appropriate repertoire may not be as powerful a tool as it might seem on first glance. "The expectation that a text of a film will make sense leads often to heroic efforts to ignore contrary evidence and force the text into one's own image of that text." (1992, 13)

He supports this suggestion with an anecdote from his boyhood in Karachi after the war, at a time when the streets were flooded with American paperbacks. Dias's personal repertoire of social and worldly understandings was rooted in his own culture and he fully expected the American stories to be startling and exotic. Thus he was not as surprised as he might have been by the strangeness of one specific title.

> I remember spending precious pennies on a book whose title read, *The Beast of Damon Runyon.* "Damon Runyon" suggested a terrifying setting somewhere in Gothic America that might harbour beasts. As I read avidly into the book, the beast failed to materialize. In fact there was little continuity from one chapter to another, so I must have constructed a rather bizarre plot in the hope that the beast would show its face and justify my trust that in the end all stories and authors honour their contracts. . . . It was only years later, when I looked at the book again, that I realized I had misread the title, which was *The Best of Damon Runyon.* (1992, 13)

No matter how comprehensive the repertoire, Dias says, the reader has to make assumptions about what insights to activate.

> I am arguing here for the primacy of expectations, expectations that will determine what background knowledge a reader will bring to the text and how that background knowledge will be used. (1992, 14)

Drawing on his background as a child in India and Pakistan who read *Treasure Island*, *Great Expectations*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Gone with the Wind*, Dias wonders if his repertoire put him at a disadvantage.

> I know I did not feel deprived as a reader; I did not feel like an uninvited guest surely to be discovered as an imposter because I wasn't of the culture. I made what sense I could; the novels were rich enough to allow me to stray and not feel lost. What relevant cultural schemata could I have possibly brought to these texts?
>
> I would describe the schemata I probably applied as experiential schemata--nets with wide holes to catch meaning and let the inconsistencies fall through; not sets of facts but skeins of relationships: what happens when? and what happens because? and who usually does what to whom?--knowledge of situations and knowledge of procedures. I knew about poverty and deprivation, parental authority and concern, love, jealousy, and friendship, anger, loneliness, and fear, dreaming and longing, caves one could get lost in, and a cemetery where the noonday ghost ranged. . . . I believe any explicit attempt to fill in the gaps in cultural schematic knowledge would have turned me off reading. I would build my own schemata and modify them as I went along. I learned more and remembered more because I had put my own construction on events--there was nothing else for it--and when I compared notes with other readers, there was some consolidating and some shifting. Since I was reading for myself and not for teachers, I had no sense that an authorized version of the text, one consigned to teachers to be transmitted by teachers, existed anywhere. (1992, 14)

There are many implications to Dias's testimony, not least of which is the suggestion that an emotional repertoire may actually be more important than a factual or cultural one.

Nevertheless, while we may argue over the degree to which a repertoire should be socially shared and authorized, there is no question that readers build up a background of understandings and insights. At least part of this is based on experience with other texts, and that experience may well influence those powerful expectations we bring to the next book, as well as being called in aid at times of confusion or ambiguity in the new text. And this background may not always be neutral or helpful. Arun Mukherjee, writing out of a background very similar to that of Patrick Dias, suggests that her literary experience actually disqualified her from taking literature as vital to her own real existence.

> Knowledge trickled down to us from the west and we paid respectful homage to every printed word that bore a western name. When we did not understand something--and there was a lot that did not make sense--we blamed ourselves for our lack of knowledge.
>
> Thus, a canon made mostly of ahistorical and apolitical Anglo-American texts was presented to me as the epitome of what constituted literature. It did not educate me in anything and alienated me from my reality. It made me believe that literature pertained to the cultivation of certain emotions--sentimental effusions over the beauty of nature, anguish over mutability--and a high-minded disdain for all rationality and abstract thought. (1988, 4)

Our intertextual background ties us to our own time. Dias was reading American books but he was reading them because of the post-war marketing situation in Karachi. Mukherjee's education in the "classics" of western literature is also rooted at a particular moment in colonial history. Yet, as it locates us, simultaneously our intertextual background makes us individual; only in the most highly regulated setting would readers share identical backgrounds. Nick Jones has provided a good definition of the intertext:

> The term *intertext* is used to describe the associative networks of textual memory from which our sense of a culture is woven. It is not bound to particular cultures. Readers of print and of television across the world share many of the same stories, the same slogans, the same photographs. They need not, however, share the meanings they make of them. The intertext is not to be conceived as a body of material objects, as in a library. It is constituted only in the collective subjectivity of readers, in the fragmentary *versions* of texts which readers carry with them.
>
> Every reader therefore constructs for him- or herself this network of interrelatedness. The nature of the observed connections will vary from generic resemblances between texts which may be commonly perceived, to chance personal associations. As individual memories are erased or overlaid, the patterns to which they contributed may be weakened or may be reinforced by new readings. . . .
>
> The concept of the intertext might be compared to that of *literary tradition*. The difference is that traditions are selective, and are defined or contested by the judgements of public bodies--publishing houses, reviewing

> panels, examination boards, universities. The intertext, on the other hand, is subjective, and all-embracing. Since it is constituted only in the memories of readers, it cannot be institutionalised; it has no authority. (1990, 165)

David Bloome and Ann Egan-Robertson (1993) suggest, on the other hand, that intertextuality is often socially constructed, especially within the classroom. Probably most readers can specify certain intertextual understandings they share with a particular group of other readers, though within any one reader's mind there may be overlapping sets of such socially-based reference points. The same is true, of course, of all our experiences and memories; it would be a very unusual person who could say that another person shared every single one of his or her reference points throughout an entire life. The classroom intertext may very well be socially constructed; so may the family repertoire of common references; but the final amalgamation of different sets of textual references is ultimately individual and probably private.

I.A. Richards suggests there is more to this background than mere richness of reference. He says that the ability to compare is vital:

> *Comparison* seems to be the key to all learning of this type. Learning to read is not fundamentally different from learning to be a good judge of wine, or of horses, or of men. Persistence of effects must be repeated frequently enough to become systematized. (1942, 45)

Gerald Graff goes one step further and points to the need, not merely for comparison, but also for the active contemplation of contrast.

> Contrast is fundamental to understanding, for no subject, idea, or text is an island. In order to become intelligible "in itself," it needs to be seen in its relation to other subjects, ideas, and texts. (1992, 108)

The noting of similarities may contribute effectively to the development of schemata and scripts and contribute to a tendency to take aspects of text such as genre more or less for granted. As a reader's experience broadens, observing contrasts may lead to a more sophisticated and conscious awareness that there is more than one way to create a story. This is not the place to explore such interesting possibilities, but it is important to note that a reader's background may have an impact in many different ways.

Some conclusions

The give-and-take between readers and writers in their understanding of how convention and process will work in the creation of a reading is based on contingency and history, both social and personal. Any such understanding is cultural in its larger terms, but individual as well. This particular aspect of reading is rendered more visible in the late twentieth-century by the explosion of cross-cultural reading and writing which has accompanied our increased mobility.

I have drawn on a fairly technical vocabulary in this account of reading, but this should not disguise the personal and idiosyncratic influences which persist in colouring an individual's understanding of a text. Each reader draws on an enormous set of tacitly developed categories and schemata, some of which may seem random and inexplicable to anyone else. There may be points of generalisation about how humans set about understanding the world, and ways of making patterns of behaviour and learning more explicit. Nevertheless, in the end, our schemata are often nebulous and ill-defined, our understanding at best "good enough," our interpretations shaded by our own "gaps" and blind spots.

Of the scholars cited above, Lennard Davis is probably most critical of the blind spots encouraged by Western capitalism; and Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson, the most determined to tackle readers' awareness of their own limitations. I am impressed by the analysis of these writers, but, at least for the purposes of this study, do not share their didactic instincts. It seems to me that there is a great deal to be learned from a posture of respect for what a reader does accomplish, even in a reading that by some accounts might seem to be limited or inadequate.

At the very least, the descriptions above testify to the complexity of the intellectual and emotional challenge posited by any reading act. Exploring the specifics of singular readings of a singular story may shed a different kind of light on what occurs between a reader and a text.

Part II

EXPLORING *WOLF*

Chapter 4

"A HUNDRED FRAGMENTS OF MIRROR": A CRITICAL READING OF *WOLF*

There are different ways of reading and discussing a particular text. One valuable way of describing such distinctions comes from Christopher Collins. He talks about three ways of reading. One is the first encounter with the text.

> If the perceiver of graphemes is also encountering the text for the first time, the reader's attention is obliged to remain here and keep a narrow focus on the words in their syntactical setting. . . . [E]ven when we return to a now familiar text we try to simulate to some extent the adventure of a first reading. (1991, xiii)

There are limits to the degree to which we may take the first reading as normative, Collins warns.

> If a literary text is composed to be stored (in memory, writing, or some other retrieval system) and reread, then it is the *re*reader's experience that must provide the norms and data from which literary theory develops its principles. The rereader may indeed imitate the perplexity and surprise of the initial reader but is unable, and should not try, to blot out all prior knowledge of this text. (1991, xiii - xiv)

There are two kinds of re-reading, according to Collins: poetic interpretation and hermeneutic interpretation. A poetic interpretation focuses on the reader's recursive, aesthetic experience. We cannot subtract our first reading from our subsequent readings, nor should we; re-readings are deepened and strengthened by our previous acquaintance with the text.

Hermeneutic interpretation focuses more securely on the text itself, on how it is constructed. This is not accomplished in opposition to poetic interpretation; Collins says, rather, that the critical and theoretical polemic of the past twenty-five years has raged between competing hermeneutics. Both approaches have much to offer.

> If I have pleaded a case for the poetic pole of the interpretive process, it is not because I would wish, or could conceive of, the institution of literature without hermeneutics and without the debates its practice engenders. Not all readings, from any interpretive standpoint, are satisfactorily skillful, and so this corrective mode has a part to play in the careful stop-and-go perusal of an unfamiliar, or indeed any revisionable, text. Our early acquaintance with a text usually involves trial-and-error attempts to achieve satisfactory constructions: whenever we step back from the text and try to verify our conclusions, we engage in hermeneutical interpretation, albeit of an informal and rudimentary sort. Like the rehearsals that precede the actual playing of a difficult piece of music, acts of hermeneutical interpretation usually precede our first complete poetic reading. On the other hand, the formal work of hermeneutical interpretation, that is, the translation of the read text into an analytic essay, cannot simply proceed by dint of analysis. It can begin only after a synthesis, in the form of a skillful poetic interpretation,

> has been performed. These two poles are, then, mutually supportive. Without one, the other is impossible, as impossible as a stick with a single end. (1991, xxi)

I do not want to go too deeply into this distinction. It simply offers me some vocabulary for ways of talking about the specific text of *Wolf*. What I will describe in the accounts of the readers is their insights into the first reading and then into a re-reading that is poetic in Collins's terms. First, though, I want to look at the book from a more hermeneutic perspective. This, traditionally, involves an analysis of the way patterns work within the text itself. It relies upon multiple readings and deals with the text as a whole, rather than as an unfinished project perceived by a particular reader. It may locate the text within a particular tradition or relate it to other texts. All of these can be virtues as long as they are not considered definitive and exclusive ways of describing either a reading or a text.

Thus, a literary criticism of *Wolf* may allow us to move backwards and forwards in the text, linking, musing, puzzling, in a way not demarcated by the linear progression from one chapter to another. We may coalesce multiple readings, aggregate them so that insights are deepened and connections made.

One reading and its context

My reading of *Wolf* is personal and not objective; it cannot be otherwise. My reading is as inexorably situated as any other reader's. It may therefore be useful to clarify at least some of the elements which fed my own reading before moving on.

There are ingredients in my reading which are drawn from my own experiences, both life and literary. I lived in the United Kingdom for many years and, from my first encounter with this book, I have taken its setting and vocabulary for granted in a way which has not been possible for those readers in this study who are not familiar with London. I grew up in a very Irish culture in Newfoundland, which further affected the way I read the book. My literary background is also specific. As a child, I read a wide range of classic and popular books, just about all European or North American in origin. As an undergraduate student of English, I absorbed many of the tenets of New Criticism and practised close reading at the expense of other approaches to text; although I am now open to a more plural and political definition of what reading means, there is no doubt that my own practice is still heavily influenced by this history.

With a background of English teaching, school librarianship and book reviewing, I can draw on twenty-five years of reading books for adolescents, including many of Gillian Cross's other novels; my sense of repertoire and convention in this genre is correspondingly specialised.

Furthermore, I am the person who decided that *Wolf* was a useful title for the kind of work I envisaged in this project; but this was a decision that could only be made *after* I had read the book for the first time (at the time of my first reading I had a completely different purpose in mind). Of the readers in this study, I am the only one who first came across the book in a bookshop; for all the other readers, all selection decisions were made in advance. My first sighting of *Wolf*, moreover, was not neutral but was weighted with professional considerations: the book was displayed as the newly announced winner of the 1990 Carnegie Medal and I was vaguely reminded that I had read a highly complimentary review. I knew and liked some of Cross's other books, but not enough to buy a hardback copy of this new title; it was some time later that I read a library edition, wondering whether I might include it in a booklist. And it was much later again, after I had decided to use this book for the dissertation study, that I began to discuss it with other readers, to look up the reviews, and to compose my own critical response.

If it were not this set of unremarkable circumstances, it would be another. One way or another, my own reading of *Wolf* would be grounded in specifics of my own background and interests. These can be relatively easily, if tediously, specified, but of course they do not compose a complete description of Margaret Mackey, reader. I have quirks, interests, tastes, talents--all these impinge on the way I read and then describe the book, and it would be impossible for me or anyone else to lay them out and take complete account of them.

Yet any description of *Wolf* which I provide must be filtered through this situation, these idiosyncrasies. I am not aiming at an impersonal account of the book; still, I hope that I can claim some credit for a rigorous and scrupulous attention to the book's complexities. Just because a reading is personal does not mean that it has nothing to offer to other readers. I agree with Michael Steig's claim that

> while there are essential intersubjective ways of making sense based on the *prior* shared assumptions in a particular group. . . there are also personal modes of understanding literary texts based on individual experience, which, when communicated, can enrich others' understanding and can move from the state of subjectivity for the individual to that of a gained, rather than prior, intersubjectivity for the social group. (xiii)

The description of *Wolf* which follows was largely completed before I began the interviews with the students and so informed my contribution to all the discussions. Also, although I tried to be receptive to what the other readers noticed in the text, it inevitably affected how I took account of their observations. To take an obvious example, since, in my judgement, the dream sequences are important in the construction of the book as a whole, I took note of how the readers reacted to the two dreams they encountered in the first four chapters; often, in the subsequent conversation, I drew their attention to the role of the dreams in the book and tried to get them to enlarge on their response.

As with every other aspect of reading, the issue of how to disentangle my own reading from the comments of the other readers appears to be open to endless convolution. Really, all I can do here is to present the problem and be as clear as I can about my own reading. Obviously I hope that readers of this dissertation will not take my interpretation for granted ("as read"?) and will read the novel for themselves. The first four chapters, on which the transcripts are based, are included in Appendix A.

The story of *Wolf*

Margaret Meek, reviewing *Wolf* for *The School Librarian* said, "It explores mind and nature, mind in society, and approaches modern urban terrorism. It also makes a nonsense of the fact/fiction divide in narrative." (1991, 29)

The story may be described very briefly. Cassy lives with her grandmother, Nan, for the most part, but from time to time, she is suddenly sent to stay with her childish and unpredictable mother, Goldie. When she is nearly fourteen, this happens again and this time she finds Goldie living in a squat with Lyall and his son, Robert. Lyall is a black school performer whose company, Moongazer, does educational theatre productions. Lyall is helped by Goldie and Robert, and on this occasion, unwillingly, by Cassy. The subject of their new production is "Wolf," both the scientific facts and the mythological terrors which coalesce under that topic.

Nan has sent Cassy off with a bag of groceries, but there is no explanation for a mysterious yellow lump at the bottom of the bag. It looks like plasticine, but isn't, and Cassy and Robert use it as a counterweight in a wolf mask.

Cassy sends Nan her new address and asks her what to do with the yellow lump. Shortly thereafter, they begin to spot an intruder lurking round the squat. Goldie's behaviour becomes more and more erratic, and Cassy eventually deduces that this intruder is none other than her long-vanished, never-mentioned father, Mick Phelan. Lyall, irritated by Goldie's lingering loyalty to her disappeared husband, tells Cassy the first solid fact about her father she has ever learned: he is an IRA bomber who was responsible, many years ago, for the deaths of many innocent civilians. Suddenly the yellow material takes on a new and sinister meaning: it is the plastic explosive, semtex.

Events are clearly working towards a climax, but before Cassy can resolve the quandary of what to do about both her father and her grandmother, who is in his power, she must go through with the school show. Various aspects and interpretations of the linkages between wolf and human are drawn out in this show, but it culminates in a moment of genuine terror and hysteria for Cassy.

Cassy's father leaves her a note saying that if she does not return the semtex, her Nan will die. Cassy's solution to this problem involves something she has always detested: acting and pretending. She finally confronts her father and challenges him to explain how he could put the defence of his territory, Ireland, ahead of his obligation to his own child. They are interrupted by Goldie, frantic to regain her daughter, although earlier it appeared that she was helping Mick. The police charge to the rescue and Mick is taken away, but Cassy is left wanting to learn more about him and determined to make some kind of contact with him again.

Of all conventional stories, a mystery/thriller is probably one of the most conservative. Not only are there reasonably rigorous rules for how it is worked out on the page, but it also almost always ends with some kind of restoration of the status quo, and some reconstitution of peaceful society. This story more or less follows these conventions and the result is the kind of page-turning suspense which usually rewards this tight use of conventions.

Sub-text and counter-text in *Wolf*

However, that is far from the "end of the story." Cross uses her conventions very skilfully, but she also shatters and fragments them at every opportunity. The key images come from various wolf stories which have filtered down to be children's fairy tales, both from Western culture and, to a lesser extent, from others. The main motif is the story of Red Riding Hood but there are also glimpses of "The Three Little Pigs" and "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." All of these stories are shifted and twisted and shattered and re-composed.

The Red Riding Hood story appears at the end of every second chapter, in a more or less continuous sequence, disguised as Cassy's dreams. The dreams are typographically marked with asterisks, indentations and italics; the language used is also radically different from that of the main story. In addition, we have been warned from the very first page of the book, in a note before the beginning of Chapter 1, that it is very unusual for Cassy to dream.

The Red Riding Hood element is implicit from the first dream onward, but it is not until very late in the book that Cross includes an unambiguous clue in one of the dreams: the line, *Grandmother what big eyes you have.* In the first dream, Red Riding Hood is represented by her basket, a forest and some flowers. Readers who put the hints and clues together, therefore, have the double satisfaction of watching the parallels between the dreams and the main story, and knowing that they have cracked one of the codes of the book.

Cross's use of the fairy tale is more oblique even than this account implies, however. When Nan sends Cassy to stay with her mother, we have an early warning that the linkage between Red Riding Hood's story and Cassy's story will not be entirely straightforward. Even at this early stage, one of the crucial plot elements has been inverted: the grandmother sends the child off to the mother with a bag of food. We also have an early use of an image which will prove pivotal in the book: the reflection. As early as page 6, Cassy is getting ready to leave, looking at herself in the mirror and putting Nan's gloss on her appearance:

> Cassy shut the bathroom door tight and glared at her reflection in the mirror. Sensible brown eyes. Sensible short brown hair. You only had to look at that face to know she wouldn't do anything wild. *If everyone was like you,* Nan said, *the world would be a simpler, sweeter place.* Sometimes Cassy wished being sensible wasn't so important. (6)

And as Nan closes the flat door, with Cassy knowing she cannot return until Nan says so, we have an image of Cassy on her own. "For a second Cassy stood staring at it, but all she could see was her own reflection in the little glass pane." (9)

So Cassy sets off into the world knowing that if she turns back for help, all she will find is her own reflection. This theme deepens and resonates through the rest of the book after she reaches Goldie's squat and finds the key image of the story. She goes upstairs to meet her mother. Goldie is in the forest, another inversion:

> Heaving her case another couple of feet, Cassy tapped lightly on the door.
> "Come in!"

> That was Goldie's voice, giggly and excited. Cassy pushed the door open, took one step--and stopped in confusion.
>
> It was like walking into an infinite forest, full of fireflies.
>
> The darkness flickered with points of flame that dipped and swelled all round her, retreating endlessly. Between the flames were dark flowers and flashes of colour that defied her eyes and teased her mind. Were they large or small? Near or far?
>
> The room had no limits. Left and right, behind and in front and above, the lights and the flowers surrounded her with patterns that destroyed her sense of space. The shock of it froze her brain and she gripped the handle of her suitcase, standing completely still as she worked out where the boundaries were.
>
> It took her more than a minute. Slowly she realized that she was looking at reflections. The only real lights were two candles, standing in bottles in the middle of the floor. Their flames were reflected backwards and forwards, over and over, up and down, in a hundred fragments of mirror.
>
> There were pieces of mirror stuck all over the walls and the ceiling. Some were coloured, some were engraved or bevelled or painted and some were plain. Some were stuck flat to the wall and some were set at an angle. In every piece, the flames danced differently.
>
> Dozens of pieces of cloth were draped round the mirrors, hiding the sharp straight edges and filling the gaps with shadowed images. Sombre flowers were overlapped by plain, dark cloth, and dim leaves twined in and out of dusty velvet. Here and there a few silver folds gleamed white, like silver birth trunks in a wood of yew and holly.
>
> Behind the flames, between the tree trunks, among the shadows, there were human shapes, infinitely reflected and repeated like the candles. But, like the candles, only two of them were real. Slowly Cassy turned to face them. (14)

This passage seems to me to be exceedingly significant. Cassy, who we saw initially seting off with just her reflection for comfort, has now had that reflection shattered, refracted, mixed up, fragmented. The effect is one of a magic forest, shimmering with fractured sparks of light. It is after this episode that Cassy starts to dream.

But this image also serves us warning of how the story is going to work. The suspense of the plot will go on working at the surface, but the story will also be composed of fragments and images. Truths will be revealed in fragments, and every truth will ultimately involve a reflection. All the characters will be linked, fleetingly or more substantially, with many of the fairy tale characters and also with the story teller.

Fragments will reflect each other as well, so that, for example, at another key moment in the story when Lyall frightens Cassy with the wolf mask, we see one character reflected and imposed on another until sorting out the reality is almost impossible. Not surprisingly, this incident also occurs in the mirror room.

> She ran up the stairs and tapped on the door of the back bedroom. There was no answer, so she pushed it open to see if Lyall was still there.
>
> He was standing by the window, with his back to her, looking out into the garden. His tracksuit hood was pulled up over his head and he was

> hunched slightly forward so that he could lean on the window-sill.
>
> "Lyall--"
>
> He turned.
>
> For a split second, her brain froze, putting everything into slow motion. Repeating the same image, over and over again.
>
> He turned--and instead of his face, there was a senseless, nightmare shape.
>
> He turned--and the yellow teeth gnashed suddenly as his jaw snapped open.
>
> He turned--and the long grey muzzle flickered at her from every mirror in the room, at a hundred different angles, tinted blue, or pink, or yellow.
>
> He turned--
>
> Cassy screamed.
>
> Wolf!
>
> The wolf where no wolf should be. Behind the door, invading the house, inside the skin of a familiar, trusted person--
>
> Werewolf. Bzou. *Loup garou*, ligahoo, lagahoo--nightmare babble for a nightmare from the dark corners of the mind.
>
> Cassy's throat strangled with terror. Her body was rigid with it. Every ounce of energy, every fibre of her muscles, every breath from her lungs went into that one, long, uncontrollable scream.
>
> It was only for a moment. Even before she had run out of breath, she could hear Goldie shrieking from downstairs.
>
> "Cassy! Cassy, darling! What's happened?"
>
> Goldie was running. Robert was running. And Lyall was pulling off the wolf mask. Sensible, ordinary life was there, all around her. There *was* no werewolf. Stupid, stupid, *stupid*-- (109 - 110)

The image of the wolf fragments and repeats and reflects many times over, but the image is being refracted as well as reflected. Lyall is Red Riding Hood in his hooded sweatsuit, but also the wolf in grandmother's clothing with his hood replacing the frilled nightcap so familiar from children's illustrations--and, further, he is the non-existent wolf of the Boy Who Cried Wolf. He is only wearing the mask. Cassy's terror is absolutely genuine, yet Lyall has taped that scream and will reproduce it at the climax of his school show, at which time it will be invaded by at least a strand of artificiality.

Goldie and Robert, similarly, may be the woodcutter, or the villagers who rush to help at the sound of such terror. Goldie may represent the benign side of the wolf who is so protective of its young. Yet, even at such a moment, Goldie is already shifting. In her extreme panic, Cassy blurts out the secret of the mask, and Goldie immediately picks it up and takes it away to remove the semtex so she can give it to Mick. Is she taking the grandmother role at this point, actually letting the wolf into the house as she has done before? Even when I *know* that it is largely a case of smoke and mirrors, I find it impossible to resist trying to trace the original icon which creates so many insubstantial floating images. And, of course, in all this swirling of themes and reflections, the plot is making an inexorable advance as Goldie learns where Cassy has put the explosive.

The idea of the different mirrors tinted in different colours is a metaphor that can also be applied to the way the book works. If we apply a "colour" to, say, the theme of "The Three Little Pigs," then we can see that colour gleam from different angles at different stages in this very elaborate book. Who are the three little pigs? At one point, they are Lyall, Goldie and Robert, with Cassy representing the wolf arriving with semtex in her bag. This motif is repeated in a tangential kind of way in the description of the kitchen in the squat; it definitely resembles one of the houses which has been "blown in":

> She had been expecting dirt, because Goldie's kitchens were always filthy, but she hadn't expected rubbish and ruin. The room looked as though it had been wrecked by a maniac.
>
> Half the floor was covered with smashed wood, fragments of lino and twisted pipes. All the kitchen fittings had been ripped out systematically and left in a heap, with the broken sink on top.
>
> The back door was barricaded. Heavy strips of wood had been nailed across the frame and dozens of plastic bags and cardboard boxes were stacked in front of it. (20)

This could certainly be the little pig's house after the wolf had finished huffing and puffing; could it also describe the aftermath of a bomb?

There is a surplus of little pigs at the point where Mick tries to break into the house from the roof and sets off the booby trap (there are four people in the house, all awake and frightened by the intrusion), but the link with the wolf coming down the chimney seems too obvious to be accidental.

In the play, of course, the pigs are explicitly Goldie, Robert and Cassy; they wear the masks; they play the parts. But even there, the identification is not uncomplicated. When Cassy is first told she has to act in the play because of the other actor's broken leg, she resists and objects. Like her Nan, she believes that the world should be serious and sensible, and that there is no place for playacting in it. Yet Goldie inverts that idea to link the grandmother with the complacent and smug Little Pig who built the house of bricks:

> "But it's easy, Cassy." Goldie gave her an innocent, angelic smile. "Just be like Granny Phelan. As if you're sure your house is the best."
>
> Cassy glared again, but she could feel her shoulders straightening and her chin lifting. As she began to pull Goldie and Robert into place, she felt exactly like Nan. She made the walls of her imaginary house straight and exact, and the corners perfectly square. Then she brushed off her hands and nodded, the way Nan did when she'd finished tidying up.
>
> "*I've* built a house of bricks!" (88)

The ease with which Cross achieves a number of effects here is quite awe-inspiring. Cassy's thoughts of Nan, the epitome of common sense and no nonsense, are inverted by Goldie to turn Cassy into an actor. This must happen if the plot is going to advance. At the same time, Nan's home is related to the house of bricks. For a number of readings, I persisted in the mistaken recollection that the third house, despite the certainty of the third little pig in his own bricks and mortar, had also eventually succumbed to the wolf and was no more secure than the splintered kitchen Cassy is already trying to clear out. In fact, of course, the story is more moral than that, and the pig who takes pains is rewarded with security. The easy answer to that, in terms of this story, is to remark on one more inversion; Nan's house is not secure. Lyall's house keeps Mick out but he lures the little pigs away, so the plot does not work that way either. The story of "The Three Little Pigs" is an essential part of Lyall's school show, but at the same time it is unsettling, refracting, subverting the very plot it is superficially serving. The effect is as dazzling as Goldie's room of mirrors.

The sets of apparently unrelated facts about wolves work in many of the same ways. At first, Robert's miscellaneous questions simply irritate Cassy and activate a minor enigma for the reader. As these different elements are gradually woven into the recognizable discourse of the school show, we are encouraged to see a unity in all this apparent diversity. The facts, however, become inexorably entangled with Cassy's refusal to block the imaginative horror of Mick's bomb and its effects on innocent people. Nan may shut it out, Goldie may remain oblivious, but Cassy feels the wave of death, blood and terror in every syllable of the recitation of the different kinds of attacks on wolves. Wolves have never killed a person, but Mick the Wolf most definitely has done just that, and in a particularly vivid and graphic way. More inversion, and in a dreadful parody of Nan's firm line on being sensible, Cassy realises, "It was all beginning to make terrible sense." (75)

Robert and Nan collect little scraps and fragments to use in their understanding of the world. Nan specialises in proverbs and sayings; the phrase, "Nan always said," is used over and over again. Robert is less protective of himself; he looks for facts but he does not close out the emotional implications of these facts in the way that Nan uses her sayings to block reality. For example, when he collects the list of species of wolf which are now extinct, his writing runs out of control:

> It was a page of notes that began in his usual neat writing.
> *Lost sub-species*
> Gradually, as he had gone down the page, the words had grown bigger and bigger. English and Latin were mixed together, straggling furiously from side to side, with jagged angry capitals at the end of each line. (77)

Cassy, still trying to apply Nan's recipe of blocking out nastiness, says it doesn't matter because it's not happening here and now. "Real life's not like that." (78) Robert is the one who is prepared to debate what real life is all about; he is the one who believes Cassy when she reaches the conclusion about the semtex. He is the one who tackles Lyall when he frightens Cassy with the wolf mask in the cause of his show. To Cassy, Robert is the touchstone, the reference point in a crazy world; he understands her need for order and helps her clean the kitchen even when it is not a priority for him. And yet, at the end, Robert cannot understand the full reality of something that seems irrational: Cassy's yearning to know more about her discredited father. Robert says, "No need to worry about that. They'll put him away for years and years, until you're grown up. You can forget all about him." (139)

Cassy knows many things now.

> *Nothing is too bad to be true! You can't shut out the night! The world is full of bombs and blood and murder and death and violence--*
>
> She couldn't shut it out any longer. Couldn't fight off her terror by pretending to be practical and calm and realistic. The darkness inside her

> head was real, swelling larger and larger, choking her as it blotted out her small, comfortable world. (126)

Robert has known this for some time, but he still does not see what Cassy sees by the last page. The darkness is real but you cannot just forget about it. By the end of the story, Cassy must embrace the wolf, learning that she is connected to her family, no matter how incomprehensible or appalling they may be.

Wolf is a book of many kinds of discourse. The fairy tales flicker and gleam throughout the pages. Details like Cassy's mac, the hooded raincoat which she wears outside as a coat and inside as a dressing gown, raise echoes of Red Riding Hood every time she puts it on; and this image is echoed in the hooded sweatsuits worn by both Mick and Lyall. The mere mention of a heavily coded word like hood or basket resonates throughout otherwise plain text. Similarly the motif of moongazing raises many kinds of echo. Lyall is a moongazer; so is a wolf. Mick, in the picture, is always looking over Cassy's eyes and it doesn't take much extrapolation to picture him gazing at the moon. The moon features in all the werewolf stories, but Goldie uses it as a shield when she lies to Lyall about why she is out in the night. Nan objects to mooning around.

Again, the motif of facade, mask, false front, appears over and over again. The houses in the street where Goldie lives look as if they are made of cardboard as Cassy approaches the entrance to the fairy tale. The house is full of masks and mirrors; the semtex is hidden behind the mask for a while and then behind the picture, so the image of the false front can conceal a very real and terrible danger.

Following any one image through the book is a complex operation and the interweaving of so many creates its own kind of story world. In addition, there are many other kinds of discourse as well. The dream sequences, powerful and portentous, inhabit the world of Red Riding Hood and emphasise the real terror which lurks in that story. Robert's lists and maps at first seem only fragmentary, but they are all linked into an explicitly cohesive whole in the school production, not only unified but even rehearsed and perfected. The flickers of television news stories, glimpsed before Nan turns them off, also reverberate in Cassy's mind, perhaps all the more evocative for being so truncated. Mick has a story which is never allowed to be told. Goldie has many stories but the one which explains and absolves Mick is never properly voiced either. Lyall, among his many other roles, is obviously a storyteller but he is unable to answer the story which rules Goldie's heart. He does, however, provide the closest we get to a defence of Mick:

> "Ho-o-o-owling!" Lyall flung his head back with a blood-curdling moan. "Snow driving over the steppes of Siberia! Ravening jaws, with fangs dripping gore!! Feet padding under the trees, following through the shadows and then--LEAPING!"
>
> His eyes gleamed and just for a second, a shape leaped in Cassy's mind. An elongated, obscene figure, with coarse grey hair and a fierce, fanged muzzle.
>
> "Don't be soft," she said shakily, waving her hand at the wolf enclosure. "These wolves aren't like that."
>
> "Oh, ten out of ten!" Lyall clapped softly. "No these are howling to show they're here. To warn other wolves to keep off their territory."

> "Pathetic, really," Robert muttered. "You'd think they would realize it's a lost cause."
>
> Lyall shrugged. "Lots of people fight for lost causes. Especially when it's to do with territory." (101)

At that point, Cassy talks about leaving and the subject changes. The correlation between the mythological wolf, the real wolf, the territorial lost cause and Mick the bomber seems very clear, however. As defences go, it is not very heart-felt, but it makes the case as well as anyone in this book is going to make it.

In the end, most of the fragments can be located within the overarching story frame; they enrich and populate a fairly spare plot. The one multiple fragment that I cannot enfold completely within the outlines of the story is Goldie herself. More than any other character, Goldie involves excessive fragmentation. While other references multiply but eventually cohere, Goldie seems to represent a referential explosion. She is the mother and the grandmother and the wolf too. She does not wear a hood; in fact she often wears a shawl with her hair explicitly streaming over it. She is Goldilocks, the naive child in the forest. She is Rapunzel, locked in a tower waiting for her prince, and an enormous list of other princesses, with her trailing golden hair. She is the Inca Sun Goddess. She is the Boy Who Cried Wolf, spotting Mick over and over again, to Lyall's despair. She is the teller of fairy tales. She is the mother wolf flying to the rescue of her child, but she is the waiting woman, willing to hand over the means of death for untold and innocent others in order to meet again with her demon lover. The implication of the ending is that Goldie has redeemed herself by the rescue of Cassy, but, in fact, it is Cassy who throws the semtex away.

When Cassy tells Robert about the semtex, he finds it hard to believe her at first.

> Robert pulled a face. "It *can't* be true, can it? We can't really be sitting here talking about it like this. There's got to be a simple, straightforward explanation. Only-- "
>
> "Only what?" said Cassy. Not smiling.
>
> "Only sometimes the horror stories are true."
>
> "And then?"
>
> He frowned. "And then, I guess, you have to work out which side you're on." (95)

Nan has equivocated over which side she is on, hiding her terrorist son over the years, sending her granddaughter away so she can't report him. But Nan has stolen the semtex and tried to get rid of it in the only way available to her. Goldie decides to come to the aid of the forces of law and order only when it is her own child who is in danger; the very real danger to other people's children does not appear to affect her at all when it is weighed against a chance to speak to Mick again. It would be possible to describe Goldie as innocent because she is amoral, but it seems to me that the emotional charge Cross has laid on the deaths of the innocent bystanders in the Cray Hill bombing makes that stand more difficult to justify. Not caring about these deaths comes across as morally reprehensible in the terms of this story. Even Nan, blocking out reality as hard as she can, is devastated by the television pictures. Goldie does not seem to care at all until it is her own child at risk.

As a reader in thrall to the story and also as a reader contemplating this book as a story for young adult readers which comes to a single-minded conclusion, I find myself actually quite pleased that there is something that is not completely tidy at the end of the book. My own reservation about the book, a small and perhaps ungenerous one, is that the multiple discourses are too smoothly tied into the single voice of the school show. The children shout together unanimously when Lyall asks them, "What is the nightmare?" (126) Of all the disparate items of information, myth, and terror which the book has given us and he has given the children, they piece together a unified answer: "WEREWOLVES!" (126) The taped scream is the theatrical curtain. Although the show is not completed and tidied to the very last moment (we never do learn how Robert talked his way to the end of the production), the effect is one of unity and finality. As a particular reader, I am aesthetically pleased that I cannot fold Goldie into that neat pattern. Other readers may not agree; they may be able to account for her more satisfactorily. I find her innocence sinister and disturbing.

And, in the end, no matter how much I re-read, discuss, hunt through pages with other readers, read other criticisms, in the end I am writing about my own reading. I am being unfair in some ways to the students whose voices will be heard later; they will be reporting on single readings which may sound somewhat thinner. Any single reading of mine would be equally halting; the aggregation of multiple readings is a textual convenience, enabling me to deal at least to some extent with the richness of options offered in this text. If there is one thing certain, it is that other later readers will raise points I have not thought of, no matter how thoroughly I think I have plumbed the text. This is a multiple reading, but it is still a specific one, and must be considered within the limitation of that specificity. I am not "the reader"; this is not "the reading".

A deconstructive reading of *Wolf*

Up to this point, my analysis of *Wolf* has been relatively respectful and obedient. I have been trying to notice what I think Gillian Cross wants me to notice, trying to produce the richest and fullest reading I can. However, there are other ways of looking at a text, and it would limit our enquiries to ignore them.

A book can also be read resistantly or deconstructively. Obviously, no text is about everything and therefore there are numerous topics which are absent from any story, by definition. However, when a text raises questions which are then shelved or ignored, it seems to me that readers are entitled to take account of such lacunae.

Catherine Belsey provides a possible starting point for a reading of the absences, gaps and indeterminacies of *Wolf*. She says,

> The object of deconstructing the text is to examine the *process of its production*--not the private experience of the individual author, but the mode of production, the materials and their arrangement in the work. The aim is to locate the point of contradiction within the text, the point at which it transgresses the limits within which it is constructed, breaks free of the constraints imposed by its own realist form. Composed of contradictions, the text is no longer restricted to a single, harmonious and authoritative reading.

> Instead it becomes *plural*, open to re-reading, no longer an object for passive consumption but an object of work by the reader to produce meaning. (1980, 104)

Wolf is not a classic realist text; we have already looked at its imagery and practice of fragmentation and reflection. However, there are certainly points of contradiction and an exploration of how they intersect and contradict may be useful.

A beginner's manual to deconstructive reading would probably suggest starting with class (or politics), race and gender. Certainly there is fruitful material for discussion under all three headings in this novel.

The political heading instantly raises the major and huge absence in the text itself: there is no description of the Irish case against the British, no voice for Mick. By the unanimous vote of the schoolchildren (whose own nationalities are not explored), Mick is reduced to werewolf, monster, horror story. Nothing is too bad to be true in this book, and nothing is important enough to justify bombing innocent children. It is cut and dried and relatively simple; all you have to do is decide which side you are going to be on (page 95). But the story of British colonialism in Ireland is not simple; and the fact that Lyall and Robert (who come as close as anyone does to speaking for the Irish when they talk about wolves defending their territory) are also presumably colonials of one sort or another, by virtue of their blackness, does nothing to justify the singular "English" voice which is all that is on offer. Cassy's decision is purely a moral one, never a political one.

The idea of political debate itself is entirely absent from this book. When Cassy does speak to her father, she talks to him about family loyalty but nothing more. They are interrupted before they can get any further.

This is what Mick gets to say in his own defence:

> "I was spoken for, before you were born. Before I ever met Goldie. The work I had to do was more important." (135)
>
> "D'you think it was easy then?...There's choices to be made that twist you in two. But once you could speak, it was too risky. Once you could go off and blab that I was there--" (136)

Cassy's third attempt to question her father's rejection of her is truncated. We are able to see Mick in some pain as a father, but we still get no idea of what is so important instead:

> "You wouldn't have done that if you were a *wolf!*" she yelled, ludicrously.
>
> There was no point in saying anything else. No need to spell it out. She could see, from his eyes, that he knew all about wolves and their cubs. The way they played with them and guarded them and fed them with food from their own stomachs. He knew--
>
> --and he couldn't bear it.
>
> Cassy saw the gun barrel rise. He stepped back until he could bring it up against her chest.

> "That's enough chat!" he said savagely. "Just give me the stuff."
>
> She closed her eyes and clenched her fists. "What's so important then? What's big enough to make you tie up your own mother and shoot your own child? Come on, Mick the Wolf. Tell me about it."
>
> Suddenly, everything was very still. Opening her eyes again, Cassy saw that his hands had stopped moving on the gun. Nan's face [i.e. Mick's face whose resemblance to Nan's she has already remarked] was sharp and motionless, as though every line had been carved from granite.
>
> "Tell me," Cassy said again, softly this time.
>
> For a second, he was staring at her and she could see him searching for words. Like a creature from another species, struggling to re-explain the whole world.
>
> But before he could say anything, someone came running along the balcony, clattering in high heels, and the doorbell rang. Instantly, the gun barrel jabbed at Cassy's chest and he scowled at her to keep silent. (137)

After Mick is taken away, Mrs. Ramage mutters, "They should all be behind bars! Animals, the lot of them!" But Mick has been described as alien by a much more formidable voice, the narrator's, joining popular opinion in calling him a creature from another species--in short, a werewolf. Just at the point when Mick is finally searching for words to describe why the Irish cause is even more important than the family tie it is presumably founded upon, he is silenced for the rest of the book. The solution to the problem of the semtex is entirely instinctual; Goldie finally finds courage to confront Mick in order to save Cassy. And, according to Nan (who is, of course, the biggest liar in the book), they can all live happily ever after. Cassy knows better--but what Cassy may eventually learn from her father we cannot know.

It is impossible to write a book about the Irish bombing the British mainland without introducing the idea of politics. Whether or not the question is raised in the explicit text, it permeates the story and the silence of the text is a fact to be observed about it. Similarly, Cross herself raises the issue of race. Lyall and Robert are black. Does this matter? Many of the readers with whom I have discussed this book have either failed to notice this fact or forgotten it as an insignificant detail. Further, many of these readers start off very antagonistic to Lyall because he is rude to Goldie and unkind to Cassy; these readers are taken with Robert so it does not seem to be a racially-motivated reaction on their part, even when they have registered the colour of the characters.

For a long time, Lyall threatens to be the bogeyman. He is fierce and unwelcoming; he treats Cassy very unsympathetically and more than once she finds him frightening. The most striking scene, of course, is the one where he turns on her with the wolf mask on, and it is probably convenient to quote this again:

> The wolf where no wolf should be. Behind the door, invading the house, inside the skin of a familiar, trusted person--
>
> Werewolf. Bzou. *Loup garou*, ligahoo, lagahoo--nightmare babble for a nightmare from the dark corners of the mind.
>
> Cassy's throat strangled with terror. Her body was rigid with it. Every ounce of energy, every fibre of her muscles, every breath from her lungs went into that one, long uncontrollable scream.
>
> It was only for a moment. Even before she had run out of breath, she

> could hear Goldie shrieking from downstairs.
>
> "Cassy! Cassy darling! What's happened?"
>
> Goldie was running. Robert was running. And Lyall was pulling off the wolf mask. Sensible, ordinary life was there, all around her. Stupid, stupid, *stupid*--(110)

Cassy sees Lyall as the werewolf, but Lyall is able to pull off the mask. "It was only for a moment." It is hard to imagine how the text could be more explicit. Is it just accidental that Lyall is black, that he can therefore be read as representing another perceived threat in English society in the late twentieth century? Is it too crude a reading to say that Cross seems to be suggesting that blacks are okay when you come to know them but that the Irish really are aliens? If we dismiss this reading, how can we incorporate the different attitudes to Lyall and to Mick? Lyall is a good and creative person; Mick is a destructive mass killer; is that the end of it? And what of Goldie, the go-between who has a man in each group of social interlopers?

Although I have made substantial attempts to track down anything Gillian Cross might have had to say about *Wolf* herself, I have been relatively unsuccessful. What may be relevant here is a comment she made about children's fiction in general.

> Our communal picture of modern Britain is anachronistic. It doesn't reflect the multicultural mix of our society. There are certainly black and Asian and all sorts of children in stories, but there aren't enough of them and they aren't there naturally enough. Most children's writers are still white and of totally British extraction and when they're drawing on their own childhood, when non-white British children were much more of a rarity in most places. Certainly I try--lots of people try--to remember that things are different now, but it's tricky. As an adult, I'm aware that there are tensions in some communities. Should I ignore them? To write about them, honestly and accurately, from a child's point of view, would take a kind of knowledge I don't possess and can't come by. . . .
>
> But I can only do the best I can to see that children from other cultures feel at home with my books, as readers, so they will one day move on naturally to being writers. (1991, 45)

An honourable attempt to include characters of different colours as a simple matter of course, as a reflection of the real urban life of the United Kingdom, is poorly repaid by what may be a knee-jerk response of imputing significance to every colour of skin except white in a novel. I have not really persuaded even myself that the role of the blacks and the Irish in this book is as loaded as I have made it out to be. Yet the gap is in the text. How significantly to attend to it is a decision to be made by the reader.

A third gap arises over the issue of gender. As far as I can see, the story of Cassy and her parents would alter very little if Cassy were a boy. The dynamics of this particular family do not revolve around the gender of the child. However, it is a different matter when we come to the infiltration of the story of Red Riding Hood. The gender of Red Riding Hood is not accidental or neutral. Furthermore, in the dreams, the sexual threat is extremely clear. It starts seductively:

> The whispering voice caressed her ear, familiar but unrecognized. She could

> not turn to see who had spoken, and her mind danced away, refusing to make a picture of the face. But she knew the huskiness, and the warm breath, and the slow, enticing murmur that went on and on.
> *Shall I show you the path? We could play a little game...* (34)

The threat begins to mount, at first mingled with excitement:

> The sugary freshness of the pine trees was all around, but under that, half-hidden and confusing, was another, wilder smell. Strong and animal.
> Her right hand gripped the handle of the basket, feeling its familiar smoothness. But under her left hand was thick hair, springy and strange. It was so deep that she could run her fingers through it. (50 - 51)

As the dream recurs, it becomes more sinister and the sexual imagery becomes even stronger:

> Did the door always stand ajar? Was there always a line of shadow down the edge? What was inside, hidden in the darkness?
> What was inside? (82)

Finally the threat always lurking in the story rises to its violent climax:

> ...and the thing leaped out of the shadows--mouth open vast, black, slavering--its red eyes glaring and its hot, foul breath strong on her face--huge and grey, with the wolf legs kicking free of the human clothing--all animal, all beast--and no time to think of Nan or what to do or how to avoid the stained, curving, murderous teeth and the blackness that came rushing, rushing, rushing, no time, no time and no defence and nothing to do except scream and scream and screamandscreamandSCREAM-- (127)

At one level, this final dream scene is a description of the encounter between Cassy and Mick (and notice that, once again, Mick is "all animal, all beast"). The violence is parallel with the horror Mick represents in the main story. But what has happened to the sexual threat which has been built up through the earlier dream fragments? And how does this tie in with Lyall's werewolf story, told earlier in the book?

Like the dreams, Lyall's story is worth separating from the plot details which surround it. This is what Lyall told (I have left out my ellipses in the cause of clarity in the story itself):

> ". . . and you must do it at the next full moon," said the wise woman. "For it is *bzou*, the werewolf, who troubles your sleep and he cannot be destroyed, except by this silver bullet. But be warned! You must not speak of this--not even to your dear father. If you do, the bullet will lose its power and there will be nothing to save you."
>
> The girl thanked her and went home. She hid the gun and the silver bullet under her pillow and spoke of them to no one. Not even to her father. But at the next full moon . . . At the next full moon, she was woken by soft heavy footsteps under her window. They padded to the door, and there was a muffled tap, low down. Two taps, and then a pause, and then two more. . .
>
> For an instant, she saw the terrible face at the window. The grey

> muzzle, the pricked ears and the long, murderous fangs. Shaking with terror, she pulled the pistol from under her pillow--and fired!
>
> Then she opened the door and a body slumped across her feet. It was the body of her father, with a bullet hole in his left temple. (64 - 65)

Cross underlines the significance of this story in more than one way. It is told in the mirror room and for the first time since the day of Cassy's arrival, the candles are lighted again and they sit in the magic forest. (63) Lyall tells the story in a special voice:

> Lyall's voice met her half-way. Not his ordinary speaking voice, but something richer and darker and deeper. Even before she could make out the words, it sent a long, fascinated shiver across the back of her shoulders. (64)

And, of course, the story is the trigger that sets off questions exploding through Cassy's mind:

> Now she knew where she had heard that signal. She knew why it had come so easily to her hand the day before. She knew--a hundred things that exploded suddenly in her head, like the answers to questions she had never wanted to ask. (65)

Clearly, both in plot terms and in terms of the overarching images and metaphors of the book, this is an important story. And what does it imply? Even a beloved father is a threat, a werewolf. Lyall is only the storyteller; the real risk to a daughter comes from a father, and not only the kind of father who is villainous enough to be a mass murderer. The gender of the daughter is of prime importance in this subtext; families, which seem so important and consoling in the case of the real wolves, become the source of the terror in the story of the werewolf. Mick the Wolf is a threat to Cassy because of the semtex and because of his treatment of Nan. Can we ignore the side issue of what kind of threat to his daughter is represented by Mick the Werewolf?

My reading of *Wolf* on this question of gender and family is certainly affected by the fact that I have also read Cross's *On the Edge*, a story which explicitly tackles the violence implicit in the idea of family as social construct. But once I raise the issue of the gap between the importance of gender in Cassy as character versus the importance of gender in Cassy as Red Riding Hood or as heroine of the *bzou* story, I find it very difficult to ignore it. In Belsey's terms, we certainly seem to have reached a point of contradiction within the text.

The complexity of the family question is compounded by Nan. She is behaving like a good wolf, protecting her son at all costs--and that hackneyed phrase resonates with sinister meaning in this book. She tries to get the semtex away from him but that is as far as she will go; and to do that, she must put her other child, Cassy, at some risk. The relationship between Mick and Nan is never entirely clarified. By the end of the book, he is imprisoning her by force. Has his hold over her always been one of violence, or is there an element of love and loyalty in her behaviour? And what of her responsibility to Cassy? She has taught her that you can protect yourself if you lie hard enough and pretend that the world can be saved by sense. Nan remains enigmatic to the end of the story. At this level of analysis, it is Goldie who plays the conventional role of mother in the story. It is Goldie who comes to her senses at the end and defies Mick to rescue her child.

So on the major issues of politics, race and gender, I find myself concluding with indeterminacies. Does this result lead to plurality? It certainly eliminates tidiness; the book ceases to be (if it ever was) reducible to a single-line plot diagram. In my own mind, the gaps resonate and cause the text to resist any form of neat closure. It may be that such indeterminacies contribute to a richer assortment of potential readings by other people. I find myself torn; at one level this process of uncovering unsettled issues leads to a feeling of dissatisfaction rather than richness. Yet I would find a completely closed and tidy text far more unsatisfying.

Reading against the text

It is probably a wider cultural shift than just my own personal reaction that causes me to turn away from the quest for unity which so gripped the New Critics; I don't want all the potential for ambiguity to be subordinated to a final unifying whole reading. Yet the discrepancies niggle, nevertheless. Why is the gender question so contradictory? Is it significant or incidental that Robert and Lyall are black? And since at least three characters (Mick, Nan and Cassy) are presumably Irish, at least technically, why does it matter that only Mick is without a voice?

These are different questions from the kind of question that arose in my earlier literary analysis of *Wolf*. Goldie is a presence rather than an absence in the text; she is a complex and ambivalent character who does not fit neatly into the plot, but she is there in the words of the text. The tidiness of the school show in assimilating all the disparate fragments of information about wolves, again, is a feature of the surface text and can be cited with page references; readers may react differently to this aspect of the book but it takes no reading against the grain to observe it.

The questions raised by the deconstructive reading work differently, though not all in the same way. Certainly my response to the particular issues I have raised is not always the same. With regard to the voice of the Irish in this book, I am inclined to regard its absence as a deficiency, a flaw in the story. This is perhaps arrogant of me, and Gillian Cross might wish to argue with me--but it is my incontrovertible right as a reader to reach such a conclusion. The question of race, of Lyall and Robert's blackness, for the time being at least, I must leave as an enigma. I cannot decide how to rate its importance.

The gender question, however, strikes me as more fruitful territory. The resonances and implications of the werewolf story, the Red Riding Hood motif, the shifting and sinister family frameworks--all seem to me to be instances of tension and ambiguity which will work to make *Wolf* interesting again when I next read it. By working out elements of contradiction and confusion, I have, in this case at least, made myself more engaged with the complexity of this text.

If one purpose of a deconstructive reading is to unbalance any sense of complacency, then this one has surely succeeded. I may not feel that my reading of the text is more plural than it was before, but I certainly feel that it is less definitive and emphatic. The absences in the text are harder to sort out than the presences. If, as

Iser says, the gaps make room for the reader to stand within the text, then I am standing on very uncertain feet. My reading is unsettled and unsure. If one of my jobs as reader is to work out some rough simulation of an inscribed author, these gaps make that project less coherent.

Yet this seems a very negative outcome for a reading effort that, again, was exciting and stimulating to work through. It may be helpful to return to Catherine Belsey's account of what a deconstructive reading may accomplish: "Instead [the text] becomes *plural*, open to re-reading, no longer an object for passive consumption but an object of work by the reader to produce meaning." (1980, 104)

Belsey may be presuming too much here. My earlier readings were not the result of passive consumption, but they did not question the text in the same way. What Belsey calls passivity might be better understood as cooperation. The attempt to establish how the author wants readers to attend to the story, to align oneself with the implied reader, is not properly to be described as passive. It is one kind of active reading.

What Belsey and others are really talking about is a form of challenge to the text in its own terms. Reading against the grain is certainly an important thinking skill. The problem is to do this in a way that is useful beyond being simply negative and destructive.

There must be strains, tensions, and unmarked forces at work in any substantial text. Some of the rhythm of a story comes in what is left out. In the case of *Wolf*, I think the shifting implications of the gender question actually add to the texture of the book as a whole, contribute a dynamic uneasiness which is one of the qualities which makes the book so potent. To some extent, it is the unanswered questions of a text which give it its charge. An exploration of such questions can be intriguing and exciting.

However, there is more to this kind of reading than being able to produce just another kind of clever critical essay. It is helpful to be explicit about some of the ideas Cross appears to be including or ignoring in this book. It is useful to consider just what the implied reader is being expected to assume. It is essential that readers learn how to take on a text, to resist manipulation. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, the object is not to dismantle the story so completely that it can never be enjoyed again.

Suspension of disbelief may stand as a pattern for other readerly duties to the text. Readers make the gesture of preparing to be persuaded by a story. An outrageous fall from plausibility may trigger a lapse of faith on the reader's part, but, by and large, a reader will accept the author's premises for the sake of the story. It is a precisely limited contract. Perhaps something like suspension of suspicion works the same way, for the limited duration of the reading itself.

At any rate, I would not expect readers of the first four chapters, either on first or second contact, to be raising the kinds of questions and issues I have discussed here. These seem to me to be *post-reading* questions. They are questions for a knowledgeable visitor to the text, one who flips back and forth, pulls out quotes, follows a theme through different chapters. This does not mean they are trivial or dilettante questions, far from it. But I think it does mean that there must be some separation between the consecutive reading process itself and the *post facto* analysis.

The first four chapters: a consecutive account

Before looking at what individual readers make of singular readings and re-readings of the first four chapters of *Wolf*, the next step is to explore them, consecutively and in detail. What do these chapters have to offer a reader? How is the invitation made to enter the book? How are the initial fragments of the patterns laid down?

Gillian Cross is a competent and experienced writer; how do I assess what strategies she makes available? Cross had an infinite choice of options when she started to write this book; we, however, must make use of the marks already on the page, no matter how we filter them through our own identities, needs, and fantasies.

Let us explore, then, the marks on the page. We are looking at a system inscribing both potentialities and limitations. How can these be described?

Chapter 1

The first two words of the book are, "Of course," in the little preamble on page 2. Two words later comes the word "never," and two words later again comes the word "always." "*Of course Cassy never dreams,* Nan always said." How experienced must a reader be to take these words as a warning, a clue about how to read the book? I found myself instantly alerted to the potential for dreaming, and the importance of any dream that might arise in the face of such thoroughgoing declarativeness. I was also immediately suspicious of Nan as a reliable observer. This was reinforced by the assertive use of such prescriptive words as "sense, sensible, no trouble." Dreams are simply a trouble to Nan, but this is a story, and dreams in stories are almost always freighted with important messages. Cross is flying a flag here, in my reading: *Watch out for the dreams!*

Chapter 1 proper begins with a pronoun. Who is "he," who pads and slinks and flickers? For a paragraph, "he" can be the wolf of the title. Then he knocks, and we know there must be enough humanity to allow for the power of signalling: two taps and then two taps. At this point, we enter into Cassy's consciousness; although the story is told in the third person, after the second sentence of the first chapter we are aware only of what she herself knows or dreams.

Nan hurries out, accompanied by another prescriptive nostrum in the parentheses of the text "(*nurses never run, except for fire or haemorrhage*)". Nan is a nurse, she does not panic, she has a slogan for every occasion. Yet she deals in a mystery that clearly confounds Cassy as well as the readers. And Cassy, obedient at this stage of the text, "floated into a dreamless sleep."

By the bottom of page 3, it is morning and Nan is standing next to the big framed photo of her son, Cassy's father. In the picture Nan stares at Cassy but her father stares beyond her, and Cassy wonders what he sees. What *she* sees is the suitcase, the symbol of exile. Cassy must go to her mother. The door to the back room is shut, and she knows she must not try to open it.

By page 6, Cross has established this mystery, and has also made us familiar with the routine nature of this sudden departure. There is something about Cassy's normal and sensible life that is inexplicable. This time, the strangeness of the hurried exile is enhanced because Nan is not even holding to the usual routine for sudden departure. Cassy is going to be sent off by herself with her suitcase and a bag of groceries.

On page 6, Cassy has her first look at her reflection, seeing it as Nan has trained her to do:

> Cassy shut the bathroom door tight and glared at her reflection in the mirror. Sensible brown eyes. Sensible short brown hair. You only had to look at that face to know she wouldn't do anything wild. *If everyone was like you,* Nan said, *the world would be a simpler, sweeter place.* Sometimes Cassy wished being sensible wasn't so important. (6)

By the second reading, the significance of this unique departure scene is very obvious. Nan seems to be getting rid of the semtex by the only safe method she can think of: getting Cassy out of the house to an unmentioned destination, staying put herself perhaps to distract her son from noticing the loss of his explosive. The twenty-pound note which she presses on Cassy seems like a sop to the exigencies of the world into which she is sending her granddaughter alone. During the first reading, however, the more natural explanation of all this hush and haste seems to ride on the question Cassy asks on page 7: "I am coming back? Aren't I?"

In the fuller light of plural readings, we may raise a question which escapes us on the first time through: what do we make of this reversal of the story, the grandmother sending the Red Riding Hood character to the mother instead of the other way around? It must mean something; all our hierarchical experience tells us that this inversion should not be pointless. What else in the story is going to be turned on its head?

Nan's insistence on the postcards is again linked to the length of time Cassy will be away from Nan, and it is again only later that we see the postcard as a key to the plot. The postcard is designed for the shortest of messages; formalities like the return address are abandoned.

Along with the postcards, Nan gives Cassy a bag of groceries. The text provides warnings: the bag is very heavy. Nan is uneasy about it. "There were two bright pink patches on her cheeks and she was talking faster than usual." (9) Cassy is not simply to give it all to Goldie, her feckless mother.

The Red Riding Hood plot is woven into this detail, of course. The shopping bag replaces the basket, but the provisions are for Red Riding Hood herself and not to be handed over at the other end. And, of course, there is no hint in the original story that the basket conceals a threat (though there is at least one parody where Red Riding Hood carries a gun in the basket and shoots the wolf when he gets too aggressive).

As Cassy departs, we see the second reflection, all that remains to her of her home.

> Nan laid the back of her hand softly against Cassy's cheek. "Be patient," she said in a low voice. "Things will work out."
>
> The gentleness startled Cassy into silence. Before she could work out what it meant, Nan had taken her hand away, stepped back inside and shut the door.
>
> For a second Cassy stood staring at it, but all she could see was her own reflection in the little glass pane. There was no point in waiting.(9)

She cannot turn back; if she does all she will find is the closed door reflecting her own face. The importance of this image intensifies when she runs into the fragmented reflections in the "magic forest" later in the story.

Cassy departs with her hood pulled over her head and buttoned "firmly" under her chin. She is off to meet her plot.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 involves the wanderings around London. Goldie has moved in with a black man and Cassy criss-crosses on the Underground from one abandoned address to another. "The sides of her hood, like blinkers, shut out the view on either side and her feet moved steadily, with a rhythm of her own." (11) This could be the forest, but it does not appear to threaten Cassy with anything more than fatigue.

The relationship between Cassy and Red Riding Hood is clear in this comparison, but another wolf story is hovering on the edge of the text at this point, to be discerned more clearly in retrospect. Cassy travels from squat to squat, looking for Goldie. Goldie has left her previous known address and moved three times. The first squat in Clapham "had been knocked down," but Goldie had moved to Wandsworth and then to Lambeth. The reference to the Three Little Pigs is oblique but unmistakable, especially given the later visit of the wolf to the roof of what is clearly meant to be the brick house, the squat in Lambeth.

When Cassy finally nears this third home, she is so tired that Albert Street looks unreal, as if it were painted on cardboard. It is dark, dirty, shrivelled. The two patches of colour stand out: Lyall's van and Lyall's front door. On a later reading, the name on Lyall's van cries out for interpretation. Why should a moongazer not be a wolf?

The wildness of the garden of Goldie's new home is emphasised.

> The side alley that led through to the back garden was even darker, and clumps of withered plants straggled against the front wall. Everything was grey or black or dull, shrivelled brown. (11)

> [T]he dark garden . . . smelt of damp earth and rotting leaves, as if she had strayed out of London into a wilder place. When a lighted bus rumbled across the top of Albert Street, it seemed to be moving in another world. (13)

The house is similarly wild:

> It was too dark to see much, but the house had the cave-like smell of mould.

> The tiles felt broken and uneven under her feet and when she touched the wall loose plaster crumbled away from her fingers. (13)

Red Riding Hood has made it through the city, into the wilderness. But it is only at this point that she enters the enchanted forest. When she crosses the threshold into the room filled with mirrors and candlelight, Cross is quite specific. "It was like walking into an infinite forest, full of fireflies." (14) This single sentence is a freestanding paragraph and clearly meant to be marked by the reader. The sense of plenitude and confusion is continued in the relatively lengthy description which follows:

> The darkness flickered with points of flame that dipped and swelled all round her, retreating endlessly. Between the flames were dark flowers and flashes of colour that defied her eyes and teased her mind. Were they large or small? Near or far?
>
> The room had no limits. Left and right, behind and in front and above, the lights and the flowers surrounded her with patterns that destroyed her sense of space. The shock of it froze her brain and she gripped the handle of her suitcase, standing completely still as she worked out where the boundaries were. (14)

It is hard to imagine a more explicit transition scene. The normal and sensible rules of Cassy's daily life with Nan may well be suspended here, and readers may not reasonably complain that they had no warning. Cross goes on to make the forest metaphor even more explicit:

> Dozens of pieces of cloth were draped round the mirrors, hiding the sharp straight edges and filling the gaps with shadowed images. Sombre flowers were overlapped by plain, dark cloth, and dim leaves twined in and out of dusty velvet. Here and there a few silver folds gleamed white, like silver birch trunks in a wood of yew and holly. (14)

At one and the same time, Cross establishes the motif of the magic wood and makes it clear that, like the cardboard appearance of the street outside, this is illusion, a stage set. There are two candles, two people, and a multitude of reflections. The flowers and leaves are printed on the pieces of cloth. The effect is like a wood, but after the first minute Cassy works out how the effects are achieved.

The meeting with Lyall is similarly flagged. His blackness is mentioned in a matter-of-fact way, but his resemblance to a wolf can hardly be accidental. He smiles at Cassy "out of the dark forest," (15) and greets her explicitly as Little Red Riding Hood. In response, she is mesmerised.

> For a moment she could not take her eyes off him. His narrow lips were taut round the dark cave of his mouth and his body was as tense as a hunting animal's in the moment before it springs. He was waiting for some answer that she did not know not know how to give. (15)

Then she puts down her burdens and tugs her hood back "briskly." She gives Goldie "a firm, sensible kiss." The enchantment is not going to take her over just yet. Lyall, too, is practical, commenting on Nan's lack of warning or money, getting Robert to make up a bed. Cassy is sufficiently impressed with Robert's competence in the normal, sensible ways of the world to hand over Nan's bag of provisions. As she does so, she gets a glimpse of something mysterious and yellow at the bottom of the bag.

The yellow continues in the first dream fragment, a bright patch at the edge of the clearing. The basket drags at her arm; the yellow flowers beckon and challenge: winter aconites with another different name, a warning name. Are the basket and the flowers enough of a signal, coupled with the earlier Red Riding Hood references? To the best of my recollection, I picked up the link at this point on my first reading. The abrupt change of tone, the typographical cues (the row of stars, the dots, the lower case opening letter, the deeper margins), the flag at the beginning of the book (*watch out for the dreams!*), all coalesce at this point. Red Riding Hood is in grave danger. But she is the one who chooses to pick the flowers.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 starts with breakfast in the ruined kitchen. Cassy is cold and puts on her mac to forage. Robert speaks of keeping the wolf from the door, but the point of his emphasis is lost on Cassy. He talks about the current project for the Moongazer shows, but does not identify the theme that links his apparently random questions. The mention of winter aconites rings a warning note in Cassy's head and she tries to distract Robert by mentioning the shopping bag which is lying in the kitchen. This leads to a description and analysis of the yellow lump at the bottom of the bag. It is all seamlessly done in terms of plot, but Cross's skill in weaving her intricate pattern is already beginning to make layers. The unidentified lump seems like a good reason to phone Nan; but Nan will not come and talk to Cassy. Furthermore, she is at home when she should be at work. At a level of ordinary plot thickening, the mystery is developing nicely.

Chapter 3 is, in a way, almost a housekeeping chapter like much of the activity it describes. The dream resonates through it in a vague, half-remembered kind of way, and Robert raises the questions that the Wolf project will later answer; but, on the whole, this chapter reverts from the strangeness of the magic forest and the frightening dream to the ordinary daily world where there are chores to be done and routines to be maintained.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, we take a look at the postcards. Cross is very careful to surround them with "pointers," as it were, drawing our attention to the fact that, in sending the postcard, Cassy is doing something very significant. She finds the postcards. She looks at the blank side. She contemplates what to say. She writes the address clearly so that Nan will know how to contact her when it is time to come home. Then she squashes in the rest of the message; it reads innocently to Cassy and probably to many first-time readers, but it contains the crucial line, "What shall I do with the yellow stuff that was in the food bag?" (28) She is interrupted by Goldie, who notices the yellow lump but is easily distracted by the mention of masks.

Cassy must postpone mailing the postcard and get on with helping to make the masks. On the backstage side of illusion, she is able to see it in its true worth: "The mirrors were lifeless in the dusty daylight and the draped cloth looked shabby. There was nothing left of last night's magic forest." (29)

At this stage, the masks themselves have no shape; Cassy cannot tell what they are meant to be. The other three discuss the brilliant new idea, giving full credit to Goldie for thinking of it. Again, Cross prolongs the attention-grabbing devices, postpones the answer to the question. Finally, Robert says they are doing wolves. Cassy immediately thinks of the winter aconite. Lyall, however, contradicts him. They are doing a show called Wolf. Wolves sound like a kind of nature talk. Wolf is something more inherent in people.

Later that night, however, the idea of wolves reverberates in Cassy's brain. How does she know what wolves look like? She is driven to try to create her own wolf, and decides to model one with the yellow lump. Her wolf is turning towards the moon. In retrospect the linkage of the wolf and the semtex is yet another cohesive image, drawing the fragments of the book together.

The dream returns that night, more sinister now. The flowers are scattered over the cloth that tops her basket. The voice in her ear is seductive: "*Where are you going? Can I show you the way?*" "*Shall I show you the path? We could play a little game...*" (34)

At one level, this is a straightforward crib from Red Riding Hood and the voice is unmistakably the wolf's voice. Yet it is Cassy who carries the postcard in her pocket, the postcard which will show the way. Of course, in the original story, Red Riding Hood is persuaded to describe the route to Grandma's house; the inversion is still prickling at the edge of this story.

So, by the end of Chapter 4, the elements of the mystery are in place: the semtex has been smuggled away from Mick but Cassy is on the brink of sending him the information he needs to find it. No one in the squat yet knows of the terrible threat in their midst but it is already clear that something is wrong. The pattern of the dream passages is established, with one at the end of each alternating chapter. The first threads which will be drawn together to make up the Wolf show have been laid out. The story is moving; the author's ways of working are becoming clearer. A reader who is going to enjoy this book is probably hooked by now.

Part III

THE READERS AND THE READINGS

Chapter 5

"IT GOT GOOD IN THE MIDDLE": VERSIONS OF GOOD ENOUGH

"As any teacher knows, practice is harder than theory," says Kathleen McCormick (1994, 154). In the writing of this dissertation, it has been a challenge to create an abstract and theoretical description of reading which attempts to acknowledge some of the complexity and paradox which attend it. But such a challenge is negligible compared to the task of trying to do justice to a group of specific individual readers and their encounters with a single text.

The hermeneutic account of *Wolf* in the last chapter will provide a clear contrast with the more immediate descriptions which the readers supply. An account of the limitations of artificial intelligence provides a useful metaphor for some of the issues which arise when dealing with real readers at work. Describing the Turing Test which is used to compare computers with real people, Frederick Allen observes,

> As the contest made plain, being human isn't about knowledge and syntax--or if it is, it is about mysteriously accumulated, emotion-distorted, often forgotten, confused knowledge, and how you got your knowledge and how you communicate it, which depends on whom you're communicating it to, and what kind of day you're having, and much more. Even the most mundane conversation has this kind of texture--and so, for that matter, does time spent in idleness without saying a word. . . . What good would a computer be . . . if it had the power to change its mind, or get bored, or forget, or wonder? (1994, 23)

The kind of highly cluttered thinking which Allen describes as essentially human was displayed by most of the readers of *Wolf* who were responding straight away, in tape-recorded conversation with a stranger. The texture of their reading was indeed affected by emotion, by confusion, by forgetting; it was a reading embedded in a particular context.

The individual readers

English language arts teachers in two junior high and two senior high schools in the City of Edmonton were asked to find readers for this project. I made it clear that I was not interested simply in working with their "best" readers. The only two clear specifications I made were that I would like some mix of boys and girls and that I would prefer to work with readers who were likely to finish the book.

Two junior high and two senior high readers (a boy and a girl in each case) come from schools with a strong academic program. The other six readers (two boys and four girls) come from schools with a more heterogeneous population, both in academic and in social terms.

All the students were volunteers, although in some cases the teacher invited them specifically to participate, rather making a general call. In the case of one school, there was a general call and four students asked to participate, though I had room only for two. In this case, the students drew straws at the first session. One "loser" (Debbie) was so disappointed at not being chosen that her friend withdrew and made the place available.

None of this procedure is in any way scientific. This fact did not seriously concern me for two reasons. One is that the total number involved was so small that there would be no gain in generalisability by enforcing procedures of random selection. The other is my persuasion that all readers are interesting if you look at their reading procedures and decisions in enough detail. I found this judgement to be supported by the work I did for my Master's thesis and in the pilot study for this dissertation. In detailed work with a total of readers now nearing fifty, I have never found an individual whose reading processes were not illuminating to an outside observer.

Not all the readers were white; at least one was not a native speaker of English although she learned it as a small child. I did not pursue exhaustive inquiries into the backgrounds of these students; the information which appears is what they chose to tell me. In the course of discussing their reading histories, I ascertained that all of them had a background of childhood reading in the English language and in what we may loosely describe as a Western repertoire (it would be stretching definitions to refer to it as a Western canon even of children's literature; the closest we came to an author of some general importance to a number of these readers was Dr. Seuss).

The readings

In many ways, the ten sets of readings produced by the dissertation project were very individual and distinctive. Nevertheless, for ease of reference, I have chosen to group them.

Four readers proceeded in a way that I have chosen to describe as "good enough." The responses of three readers were particularly marked by their emotional engagement with the contents of the story or with one or more of the characters. Two readers stood out with respect to their more intellectual engagement with the workings of the text. The final reader I described in the first drafts of the dissertation as "all of the above;" she was engaged by the contents, intrigued by the textual cleverness, and combined an attention to momentum with a detailed interest in retrospective admiration.

The readers also demonstrated personal idiosyncrasies and patterns of response, and I have dealt with these on a more individual level. In all cases, it is important to remember that we are dealing not simply with the reading behaviours of any one reader, but with the reading behaviours of a single reader in an encounter with a single text. *Wolf* is a participant in these readings as well.

This chapter deals with the first group.

Four of the ten readers, all junior high students, found the book challenging, even confusing in places. Three of them encountered points where their interpretations were actually mistaken; the fourth never rose above a tepid response to any aspect of the book. To what extent did their misapprehensions interfere with their reading experience?

This chapter discusses the responses of these four readers and investigates the idea of what makes an interpretation "good enough" to suffice for the reader. What are the limits of what is good enough? Who decides? The detailed commentaries of these four readers makes some contribution to our thinking on this subject.

Brenda--Grade 8

Brenda likes to read and has a network of supportive friends who swap titles and discuss their favourite books. She was not an enthusiastic reader as a young child, however; when she moved into junior high she became friends with an avid reader (Christine, whose reading appears later; this was the only friendship pairing among the ten readers) and began to read more. Her tastes are largely for horse stories and for horror stories by the likes of R.L. Stine.

Brenda does not read in bed every night, but she does seize any opportunity for an extended read and often appears to get into trouble with her mother for reading when she should be doing something else. Her favourite novel is *The Black Stallion* by Walter Farley.

Suspense and action are important to Brenda and she sees books as a kind of private TV show. In many ways she did not come across as a sophisticated reader but she was able to differentiate between the kinds of books that she reads. For example, in this short exchange, she distinguished between horror stories and horse books.

> *Brenda*: Sometimes I do think I'm in the book, like, I'm one of the people who are always watching or something like that. I had, sometimes I have dreams about, about me actually as a character, but instead of the character's picture there, it's me and I'm acting it out and stuff like that, but I change it around. A lot of books have experiences that I've gone through so I can really relate to what the author is talking about.
>
> *Margaret*: And is that important?
>
> *Brenda*: Yes and no. Depends what kind of book it is. Like, in horror books it doesn't cause they're fiction, right? They don't really happen. But in horse books, they do. (laughs) Cause, like, I can, I do ride and everything like that, so--
>
> *Margaret*: So you read different books quite differently, then.
>
> *Brenda*: Yeah. Depending on what kind of book it is.

Brenda's reading

In her first reading of the first chapter, Brenda made some tentative predictions about what might happen: Nan's illness might mean that she could die later in the story; Cassy might run away from Goldie again and get into more trouble. With the second and third chapter, she was beginning to make mental notes of what to watch out for:

> I'm really suspicious about Goldie's boyfriend because he seems like, he sounds like a nice guy but he also, it sounds like he has a dark side to him so, like, that may cause some problems, you know, maybe he would be abusive and stuff. And, um, that picture she has, it seems very, like, it's very suspicious because it, it always mentions, it mentioned it in Chapter 1 and I think it might have something to do later on in the book.
>
> That yellow stuff, it's suspicious to me because the grandmother never told her anything about it, but yet where would it come from in that house? So I think something's going on with her grandmother and that stuff.

By chapter 4, she was beginning to make value judgements; in 13 lines of transcript she uses the word "weird" no fewer than five times to discuss the Moongazer group and the arrangements in the squat. She was still looking for hints about the shaping of the book:

> One thing that I did notice is the, the group is really weird, so, I don't know, that might have some effect on the end of the story. Something could happen in the play or something like that.

In the second reading, Brenda was picking up the significance of details which had passed her by on the first reading. She commented on Nan's eagerness to push Cassy out of the flat and suggested that this was because Nan was hiding Mick. She made note of the care with which Goldie's friends questioned Cassy before they gave her directions, and suggested that they thought someone was looking for Goldie. "I think he knew that, um, um, Cassy's dad was trying to find Goldie but I don't know why it might have been." Similarly, she suggested the notice on the door of the squat was directed at Mick.

At this point, Brenda's analysis of the plot became confused.

> I think, you know, maybe he [Mick] tried to hide the bomb in the house and then it just ended up in Cassy's bag somehow because it might have been there before, like, it might have not just been in the bag or something like that.

This confusion continued through her discussion of Chapter 3:

> One of the things I noticed is that she found a yellow lump. It wasn't, it wasn't in her bag before because it said, it, that I think she gave it to Robert or something? Yeah, Robert. He'd looked through the bag but he did not notice it. He saw everything else but he, he, they never mentioned any yellow substance that he saw in the bag. So it might have gotten there overnight while she was dreaming, cause it said at the end of Chapter 2 she was having a dream. So he might have, her father which is probably the guy that they see around, snuck into the house and put it in the bag to hide it there.

Brenda was attending to a number of details but she was not in clear control of the plot, as her comments on Chapter 4 also illustrate:

> This Moongazer play that they're going to do, it's called Wolf, I think it is, about wolves. It was all Goldie's idea. I think that it wasn't really her idea, that it was Mick's, or something like that, Cassy's father. Because I think that secretly, um, Goldie and Mick are actually, like, well, not seeing each other, but friends, and, you know, they talk every once in a while. That's how he might have got in the house, he might have, not snuck in, like, he might have, she might have let him in, and, but she didn't know that, that's what he was doing, putting the stuff there because it says when, when Goldie walked into the room to see Cassy, she bumped the bag and the yellow stuff came out and she asked Cassy what it was. So that's why I think that's how he got in and that, cause, Goldie said that she doesn't know where Mick is but it, it seems like she does. That could be a possibility because, all, because Mick liked wolves and everything like that.

Brenda's account is clearly mistaken. She has missed the whole section of the plot which deals with the postcard and the inadvertent revelation of Cassy's address. In some ways, this misreading left Brenda confused; she stumbled over ways of making her version cohere. At the same time, there were elements of the book that she clearly found satisfying and about which she could make thoughtful comments.

Brenda said several times that she thought *Wolf* was a really good book. As a bald assertion, from a student to a researcher, this would not necessarily be very persuasive. But Brenda provides a more circumstantial account of her reading which does have a ring of conviction about it.

> I thought it was a really good book. It started, I always think a book's boring at the beginning but it, it got, it got good in the middle. That's what I liked about this book, and also it was, it was really weird because first of all you thought that the person that was, um, you know, breaking things and sort of like that and trying to get into the, in Goldie's house, was the people who own the house. But it, it showed in the book that it was really Mick so that was really weird.

Although she was confused about Mick's role in the plot, she was unambiguous about his moral role in the story:

> Mick is a really cruel man because when Cassy tried to talk to him about her, he never said much of anything. He says, like, one or two nice things and then the rest turned out nasty. That he doesn't really care about her, cause the only thing was that she, he thought of her, he thought of her as his daughter until she started to talk because then he had to go away because she might find out too much, you know, and she'd talk about it accidentally, cause some kids do that so-- Yeah, it, it is a really good book.

Brenda seemed satisfied with her own interpretation of the plot but she was explicit about being confused over the ending. The final segment of the book is indeed ambiguous--is it another dream, is it a story (and, if so, of whom?), is it the conclusion of *Wolf* itself? Brenda registered this ambiguity, but did not really know how to react to it:

> And one thing I did not understand was at the end. The end. I did not like the end when it had the, the, the way it ended, like she was reading a story, cause that was really confusing. Cause she stopped, stopped off, like, reading the story, like, it sounds like she was reading a story and then all of a sudden it sounds real. You know, it's really weird, like, I thought, like, you know, maybe somebody wrote a book about it or something, I don't know.

Brenda identified the dream segments as dreams but seemed unsure how to treat them. Like many other readers, she was puzzled by the numerous references to the winter aconite. When I asked her outright, she said that the dreams did not remind her of any other story she had ever come across, but it took very little prodding to get her to expand her reading. I asked her to look at the dream section on pages 33 - 34 and she produced a paraphrase of it. We continued as follows:

> *Margaret*: Um, the dreams go on, she's going through the forest and then, just have a look at the one on page 82, see where she gets to in this dream when she finally comes out of the forest and see if that reminds you of anything.
>
> *Brenda*: Ohh, Little Red Riding Hood!
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah, just have a quick look through and look at them, see how, see how many--
>
> *Brenda*: They all go together now. Okay, I see. I didn't know what those flowers were, that's why I didn't--
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah, it's distracting. And of course that ties in with the title too, doesn't it?
>
> *Brenda*: Yeah. Yeah, it does. Yeah, it's like, it's like, it's like a different version of the Big Bad Wolf but she's in it, and I think it's her father who is the big bad wolf.

Brenda was quite animated during this discussion and went on to make a number of points about the book as a whole. Her major emphasis was on the characters and she was quite perceptive about them. Goldie, she said, was "a kid trapped in an adult's body because the way she acted she was, like, immature sometimes, sometimes she was responsible, and other times she was just plain weird." Mick was also weird. "He liked wolves but he sort of acted like one himself.

She approved of Lyall and Robert, and suggested that Lyall was not unreasonable to be suspicious of Cassy at the outset.

> I thought he just didn't trust her at the beginning, that she was going to be a nuisance, that he didn't have enough money to support all the people, cause they were, money was tight as it was, but I didn't think, like, he really didn't hate her or intended to be mean, it was just that he was kind of annoyed that, cause Goldie never told him anything about it, that's why they didn't open the door. . . . But at the end he was really nice, after, like, at the end of the play.

So far, Brenda had stuck more or less closely to the text, but at this point she began to introduce her own opinions. She couldn't understand why the trio lived in the squat; they must have made a reasonable amount of money and could have afforded a small apartment. She thought Nan succumbed too readily to Mick; she should have been braver and called the police. And she had her own account of what happened at the end of the book:

> I think at the end that Goldie was more supportive and she, like, was really responsible, and I think--it didn't really say at the end of the book--well, it did, that she was at, at her Nan's, but I think after that Goldie and Nan and Lyall and Robert all had a better relationship through the experience that had happened between Mick and, you know, the play and, you know, understanding everybody better being through the situation that they were in.

Brenda appeared to have made enough sense of the book to have enjoyed it on her own terms. Her response to the recognition of the Little Red Riding Hood theme suggests that she had some coherent feeling of the shape of the book; she was quick to see the potential of the parallels. She made some errors of interpretation, and it would be interesting to know if these errors would have persisted through a second reading. Her summary of the plot was correspondingly troubled; yet there seems little question that, for at least some stages of her readings, she was being engaged and stretched as a reader.

Hami--Grade 8

Hami was a reader who liked sequels: "I like books that have continuings, it's, they make it more interesting, cause you know the character and everything, and you know what he's been through.

His favourite books were *The Book of Three* by Lloyd Alexander, and its sequels. At the time of the interview, he said he was reading *The Odyssey*. It would be possible to be suspicious that such an assertion was simply made to impress, but Hami felt obliged to explain what *The Odyssey* was, in case I didn't know, so this seems unlikely.

> I have been reading *The Odyssey*, you know, those Greek legends and all that, about Zeus and Perseus and Hector. I find those interesting, it's nice to know some mythology and, you know, what they're thinking of, what people think of, in Greek and all that, although it's only legends and all that, but they're kind of, like, adventure, cause they do get, they get very interesting and exciting, and there's, sometimes they're confusing cause you don't know who they are but, you know, since you study at some, like, in Grade 6 we studied it, so you know who they are, it's kind of like, you know, books that continue.

Some of Hami's preference for sequels and "continuings" may arise from the fact that he admits to finding new books confusing. He does not like to re-read whole books, but he does sometimes return to the early chapters of a book after he has begun to make sense of the story.

> I can't [re-read], I can't do that, I think once you've read the book it gets kind

> of boring, so if I go over a book, like, I usually start wandering off somewhere, I can't really--. But, if, like, I read the first two chapters or the first four and I don't understand it and then later on in the book I get used to the book, then I go back in, you know, I kind of make sense. Like, once I read *The Book of Three.* It was a first series, so I didn't, I didn't like it actually, so until it got, you know, where he fights the Horned King and everything, so I go, I went back in, read, read the first two chapters over.

In many different ways, Hami referred directly and obliquely to his problems with understanding the early stages of a new book. Sometimes he will give up on a book if he doesn't like it, but even with the ones he enjoys the most there is an initial hitch. "Some of the books I choose, I don't get attracted right into them, like, it takes me quite a while until I fit into them." It is perhaps not surprising that the first complete book he remembers reading, *James and the Giant Peach*, was one which his teacher started reading to the class.

Hami has a friend who suggests titles and discusses books after they both have read them. This friend is useful because he likes similar sorts of books: fantasy, adventure, but not mystery. Occasionally Hami reads something outside his usual pattern: he spoke of *The Bridge to Terebithia* (which he liked very much) and *Lord of the Flies.*

As well as sequels, Hami actively likes different versions of the same story; he mentioned Robin Hood in this context and, when asked if he would be interested in different versions of *The Odyssey*, he said,

> Yeah, I'd like to compare them and, you know, kind of notice the difference, like, what's the difference between this and, like, kind of like urban tales, you know, how two people give different type of stories and, you know, you just like, I just like finding the difference between them and comparing them and which one's better and which one attracts the reader more.

Hami is also working his way through a game book series called *Grail Quest* which involves rolling dice to make decisions about what to read next.

Hami's reading

Hami's preference for sequels and re-tellings would make sense if he has trouble in initially sorting out the characters of a completely new story. This difficulty certainly featured in his first reading of *Wolf.* He said himself in the interview that he didn't understand this book at first, and this was borne out by some of his suggestions about the characters, particularly in the first reading.

Hami was a slow reader and our first session together was interrupted when we had to change rooms for a timetable shuffle. As a consequence, he was the only reader not to read the first four chapters in one uninterrupted session. When we parted, at the end of the first day, he had reached the end of Chapter 3 and was floundering. I kept the copy of the book and, when we met again the next week, he read Chapter 4 and discussed it much more confidently. In Chapter 1, Hami recorded Nan's eagerness to get rid of Cassy, the mystery of the strange door, and Cassy's confusion about the need for haste. He observed the emphasis on the picture of Mick and commented on its likely importance.

> It talks about this nice picture, this picture that she, there was this guy in the background that she didn't know, and it kind, you know, the girl's just packing everything up very quickly and, you know, she, she doesn't even notice the door this time when she's in her room packing, and so she just, you know, she just puts the picture and, you know, you know something's going to happen with that picture later on in the story. So that's what I like about this part. So, you know, you kind of just think to yourself, stop and pause and think what's going to happen. And I also like, you know, how they describe bit by bit, how, you know, what she's doing and they don't forget a detail, so it, kind of, you know, you have to pay special attention to what she's doing and, cause I almost missed that part about, *She threw the picture.*

Hami sympathised with Cassy and drew links with his own experience, recalling his mother in a hurry at breakfast time, and commenting on Cassy's trip through London.

> She kept on moving and moving and she kept asking everyone, and it kind of, like, you know, when I was small, my dad kept on moving, at the same time I'd have to keep following him, and, you know, it kind of gets annoying after a while and, you know, she just travels in the dark all by herself and, you know, her feet are sore and all that, so that kind of happened to me as well.

It was with the advent of Robert, Lyall and the squat that Hami started to get confused. Initially he began with Cassy's own questions.

> She knocks on the door and this boy comes and, um, it kind of makes you wonder who it was. And she, she kept on wondering, like, he was 14 or 15 and stuff like that, so you kind of picture what kind of person he'd be.

Hami commented approvingly on the mirror room, but as Cassy moved through the house his grip on the story became less assured.

> I like how they describe the room she's in, like, this is just walking and everything, and you know, you know for sure it's a very big house cause there's hallways and nice candles and everything. And she's got a, um, she's got this, I think, butler or something who's doing everything, he's showing her her way and everything.

Cassy shows Nan's "stuff" to Goldie, according to Hami.

> She notices, like, she notices that Goldie didn't even bother taking her stuff, she only had her butler or whatever that guy was, he just came and took it and read it and he just, you know, gave her information or told her about it and Goldie didn't even care.

At this stage, Lyall, Robert and the "butler" seem inextricably muddled. Robert shows Cassy the way but Lyall reads the letter. It does not become any clearer as Hami moves through the chapter.

> On page 14, okay, I like this part because this, this nice guy comes over, this kid, who first came into the house. He, um, he, you know, all of a sudden he's happy that she's staying and everything, and you don't know why, so you kind of, you know, wonder what's going on, how did he, why is he so excited and all of that? And on page, page 16, um, okay, um, I like this part because, um, okay, um, Goldie's wondering everything, she's wondering about why Nan's not here and everything that's going on, why she, why didn't she come, and, you know, and again, Casey's [*sic*] just thinking, like, it's none of her business, just like that door in the first chapter that she didn't, she was so curious but she didn't, she didn't even bother to open it, and this is, like, kind of the same thing. You know, Georgie [*sic*] and Rob, the butler's just wondering what's going on and why she, and why her grandma, Nan, didn't come. So Casey's just, you know, thinking to herself, this is none of their business and I like that, cause I think that a lot when people, you know, just start wondering about someone else and all.

Clearly Hami's picture of the squat is more luxurious than Cross's. He wonders why Cassy is not excited to have a nice big room. He registers the "bananas" in the grocery bag and suggests that someone else might have packed the bag since Nan would not have packed bananas at the bottom. His main reference to the dream is to comment on Cassy's inability to name the flowers.

By Chapter 3, Hami had registered that the house, though big, is exceedingly messy. He is still referring to Robert as the butler. He raises questions about what kind of person Goldie is, wonders about the yellow substance in the bag and comments on the mystery raised by the telephone call to Mrs. Ramage.

As we reached this point, Hami had to return to his class and we met again to read Chapter 4 a week later. I asked him not to speak to the other readers and, from the way he spoke, I believe he complied. He readily acknowledged later that he had been confused at the beginning. His comments were clearer this time and there was no mention of a butler. He discusses the yellow stuff in the bag, the mystery concerning Nan and the question of what the big idea for the project might be. At this point he aligned himself quite explicitly with Cassy. She knows that wolves don't look like the masks the others are making.

> So she's, she's confused and you're confused yourself, like, how, how did they look like, you know, that they describe them quite well and everything, and you're trying to get it through your mind, um, what's, what's that, you know, and what they're trying to do and, you know, not only Casey's trying to figure it out but you're trying to figure it out yourself.

Hami may be confused at this point but he has faith that there is some purpose in the way the book is being constructed. In his comment on the second dream, he says,

> You know that maybe her dream's going to give her an answer or something cause she heard a voice whispering and you're wondering, maybe later on in the book, like, you're going to, her dream's going to get her somewhere and all that.

On the second reading, Hami continues with this quest for purpose in the construction of the story. Of the picture, he says,

> She packed her stuff and she, she saw this picture with someone in it. She knew, she wanted to, she wanted to know who he was and where he was, except she, she read his name but she couldn't pronounce it right and it makes you wonder, you know, what's going to happen, is he going to be later in the story because why would they put a person in the picture without having a purpose for it? So, um, accidentally she packed the picture, so you know that she's going to look at it later on in the book and everything.

In his account of Chapter 2, the idea of the butler has sunk without trace. Lyall and Robert are now clearly distinguished.

> She notices this guy's with her, but, you know, he's around the fifties, around the fifties and everything, and, um, he was unusual and asked questions and he was curious for a minute. . . . He calls for Robert and Robert comes and sends her to her room but, um, Robert is kind of a strange character because the author describes him and in the way she describes him, it's not like a, it's not like he's like Goldie and, um, and Lyall, because she's, Robert is, he's kind of calm and everything, unlike Goldie.

Hami said he found the book confusing at the beginning, but he liked the way the author kept him reading.

> For the project thing, like, you know, it says it's a big project but what is that project, so I kept on reading it and I found out and, you know, just, the further you went in the book the more you started thinking about it, and it kept, kept on making you going so I, I thought it was pretty good actually, a good job by the author.

On his second reading, Hami did not even mention the dreams and he did not make any immediate association with Little Red Riding Hood. When he was questioned about the dream sequences, in the final discussion, however, he had several interesting comments.

> I found most of them were kind of like, they were kind of like, you know, you know, I thought they were her dreams because, you know, it kind of led, it led you into, she saw a dark cabin, like you know, something like herself, you know, in the book, that she's going to go into a dark place and that did happen at the end, she goes into a dark place and she, and somebody grabs her, and so, I kind of found that interesting, like, it's, um, you don't find many books with that, it's kind of leading you to, you know, thinking, you know, what they're all about. It's kind of a mystery but when you really think about it, like, you fit 'em all together, you kind of see what they're getting and what they're leading me to, so, so I thought that was pretty neat.

Looking through the dreams, one after another, Hami was reminded of TV shows and movies rather than books, though the idea of running in the forest did cause him to mention *The Bridge to Terebithia.* When he was questioned explicitly about the line, *Grandmother what big eyes you have*, he did make the association with Little Red Riding Hood and went on to draw some links.

> And that does happen in the story too, like, you know, the, it's kind of like the big bad wolf and all that, and so, you know, it's kind of the same idea, what big eyes you have, so there's all through this part and there's a wolf in the story, so, kind, it's kind of a connection.

The next dream section is the one involving the scream and Hami talked about horror stories. Of the final segment, at the very end of the book, he had this to say.

> This one, um, it's just kind of like most stories, like, they don't have that but it's kind of like a happy ending and everything and the dream finally comes to an end and everything. And, um, and it was kind of like, the connection's ended and you, what's finally, you know, it's happy ending and everything and she, you know, the mystery is solved, kind of, in a way it's kind of sad, like, you know, finished, and you know, you want it to, you kind of hope the book is longer so that you could keep on reading and reading it, you know, find out more of those secret messages or dreams she had.

Hami was not polished or articulate in his responses to *Wolf* but, at least tacitly, he seems to have noticed many elements of the construction of the book. Although he did not put it in such terms, he clearly had an idea of the dreams acting as a kind of counterpoint to the main story; he observed this pattern at work and appreciated it. Against this level of awareness, how important is his thoroughgoing but apparently transitory misunderstanding about the squat and its inhabitants, the palatial corridors and the butler? At least part of his problem seems to have arisen as he processed the actual names of the characters. He mispronounced Cassy's name for most of the discussion, he could not pronounce the name Phelan and assumed that Cassy could not do so either (even though, as it turns out, it was her own name), he mixed up Robert and Lyall and, on one occasion, he called Goldie, Georgie. How much of this was sheer carelessness and inattention? How much was an inadequate repertoire of proper names? I suspect that many readers are probably less than scrupulous with the processing of proper names in fiction; they do not have the same kind of content load as common nouns and, provided we can distinguish the characters, a task for which different starting initials would be sufficient, it may well be that we do not worry about precision or pronunciation until we have to talk about the book.

In any case, Hami's confusions seem to have disappeared. He knew that he had been muddled during the first stages but he seems successfully to have abandoned his worst misunderstandings by the time he got to the second reading.

Christine--Grade 8

Christine likes to read and is seldom without a book to turn to, but her tastes are very conventional: she likes murder mysteries, particularly those by R.L. Stine, she likes teen romances, she likes *The Baby-sitters Club* series, and she likes books "where they tell you about people's problems." Like her friend Brenda, she read little during her elementary school years, and what she did read was "mostly about princesses and fairy tales." Christine began to read more in Grade 6, and in Grade 7 and Grade 8, she says she read non-stop.

Christine owns more than 30 books, she says, and borrows others from her friends, whose recommendations she trusts. She is a re-reader; she has read most of her books twice and the R.L. Stine books she reads over and over.

She cannot remember learning to read, nor did she comment on what altered her attitude to reading at the end of elementary school, but she has a clear picture of her reading style now. Asked how she would describe her place in the story as she reads, she did not hesitate.

> *Margaret*: When you read a book, where in the book do you feel that you are? Where in the story? Are you watching? Are you inside one of the characters? Are you participating in the story?
>
> *Christine*: Usually, in the end, it's like I'm watching it. And the middle. Like, not, not straight at the beginning, but, like, in the middle towards the end.
>
> *Margaret*: Can you describe how the beginning is different?
>
> *Christine*: I, I need to get the, how, how, the character of the person, how they act and think.

Such eloquence was unusual for Christine. Of all the ten students who participated in this project, Christine was by far the most taciturn. Her transcripts show a much higher preponderance of my comments than any of the others, and her replies tend to run to one or two lines at most. Once or twice, there is no doubt I fell into the trap of asking leading questions, as I tried to get her to expand her answers.

Christine's reading

It is very difficult to say whether Christine's account of her reading of *Wolf* reflects a perfunctory read or an inarticulate response. Once or twice she volunteered a surprising comment, but for the most part she stuck firmly to the most obvious aspects of the plot.

Chapter 1 reminded Christine of *The Secret Garden*, "how they were going to have to leave her, her old home to a new house." She commented more than once on Cassy's obedience in not opening the door, and said she would have opened it. She also noticed the construction of the story, saying, "When she was putting her pencil case in the suitcase, I didn't think she would put the photograph in, so I think the photograph must have something to do with it."

Like many other readers, Christine had a fairly low opinion of Goldie.

> I thought it was kind of weird that, that Goldie had, like, just moved and not told Cassy or her, or Cassy's Nan about it. And then . . . it seemed, um, unusual that Cassy's Mum, Goldie, had helped those people set up, cause she doesn't seem like the person, cause she left without telling.

Of the first dream, she said tersely, "The bottom of page 18 and top of page 19, it reminded me of a poem." She did not mention the second dream. By the time she reached Chapter 4, she was concentrating on why Cassy had written such a short note. Christine likes to write letters about four pages long. She made further comments about Goldie, and drew analogies with her own home life.

> When they're making the, the masks, when they were fighting, it, I think it sounded like, um, Cassy's Mum, Goldie, was just like a little kid, and they were real adults. Just like me and my sisters were fighting. And then, Cassy was making the wolf, it reminded me of my little sister, she was making dinosaurs with clay.

The winter aconite puzzled her, as did the yellow lump in the package. She was surprised by the mess in the kitchen and commented on how smart Robert seemed for someone who doesn't go to school.

Christine's second reading raised questions very similar to what she had noticed on her first reading. Once again she commented on Cassy not opening the door. "I still think that she should have opened the door cause then she would have solved the, it would have helped solve the puzzle better." Once again, she was struck by Goldie's heedlessness in moving without sending a message. "How irresponsible was Goldie, like, to leave, like, she should have, um, wrote Cassy or Nan to tell her she was leaving."

She did remark specifically that she was paying more attention to descriptions on the second time around, and used more detached language to describe her response.

> The description of the Moongazer, I, I paid more attention to it this time. And then, on page 15 and 14, I paid more attention to the setting of the room with the mirrors.
>
> On page 20, I paid more attention to the, how the writer described the scene. On page 20 and 23, I paid more attention to when they were talking about the Moongazer.
>
> I paid more attention to the, the description of the front bedroom.

Her only comment on the dreams in the second reading came at the end of Chapter 4: "I still, I still don't get the, the dream." When we pursued the dream issue, after she had finished reading the first four chapters for the second time, she came up with a variety of associations: unnamed books where the characters ran through the woods, Hansel and Gretel finding the cottage, Little Red Riding Hood. She was not prepared to expand on any of these suggestions.

Christine said she liked the book, and did have some detailed remarks on this topic.

> I liked how they, how they used the idea of, um, the plastic bomb. Cause usually you don't find books like that. And, usually the books, in the books I read, there's um, the father, he usually, like, when his daughter is talking to them, their hearts soften, but his didn't. So I found that different. But I still think, I think it was weird, the way they use the idea of a wolf.

It does not take too much of a leap to see a reader with a clear grasp of the conventions of the books she normally reads. Christine did say that she might well, on her own initiative, have picked up *Wolf* on the strength of its cover. Asked if she would have kept reading if she had not had external reasons to do so, she replied, "Mmm."

Much of Christine's conversation was as non-committal as that final remark. She gave no sense of having been engaged or excited by the book. Her grasp of the important plot details was certainly adequate; in her response to the first reading she mentioned the following: the closed door, the letters and stamps, the photograph, Goldie's character, Lyall's interference with the letter, the dream, the mess in the kitchen, Robert's cleverness, the winter aconite, the yellow lump, the postcard, the masks. On the second reading, she added the twenty pounds, the Moongazer group, the mirror room, Nan's refusal to come to the phone, and the Wolf project. For somebody giving very short answers, these lists represent a fairly comprehensive outline of the major structural points of the first four chapters.

If I were to search for a single word to describe Christine's reading of *Wolf*, that word would be "adequate." Yet my overall impression at the end of two sessions was one of a very tepid reaction. She said she had enjoyed the book, but there was little evidence of this in any form of vivid response. Whether this is a reflection of Christine's normal mode of reading, or of her true response to *Wolf* undisguised by politeness, or of the artificiality of the situation itself, I simply cannot say. Certainly as the transcript stands, it represents one particular kind of reaction to a book: "it was okay." This response, of course, is an entirely legitimate one.

Greg--Grade 8

Greg was an interesting reader but he did not really enjoy *Wolf*, with consequences that are noteworthy in their own right. He read very quickly with the result that there was rather more time for his interview than for some of the others, an effect which was compounded by the fact that he had relatively little to say about *Wolf* and much more about his other reading.

Greg is clearly an inveterate reader but one who often has difficulty finding a good book to read. His description of himself as a reader evoked a picture of someone at an important transition stage: he made many remarks about the virtues of Kurt Vonnegut but he is also not above sneaking a look in the library at a new Hardy Boys book. He doesn't like books to be too predictable but he doesn't like them to be too unfamiliar and taxing either. Indeed, it would not be very unfair to describe him as a touchy and fretful reader in ways which many other readers might instantly recognize. Take this stretch of conversation, for example.

> *Margaret*: What are you reading now?
>
> *Greg*: Right now? I just finished *Congo* by Michael Crichton.
>
> *Margaret*: Was it good?
>
> *Greg*: Yeah, it was a good book. I kind of don't like reading really good books any more because then I don't want to read anything after that because

> it's not going to be as good.

One remedy for this problem, re-reading, is not available to Greg. He said flatly that he never re-reads books, he always remembers what happens. Around Grade 4 he read large numbers of Hardy Boys books and would occasionally get confused about whether he had previously read a particular title. If he got partway through and realized that he had picked it up before, he would stop at once rather than finishing anyway.

Greg is also quite happy to abandon a book after 50 pages or so if it "doesn't get moving." He described himself in terms of considerable ambiguity.

> *Greg*: I won't just read the first pages and then, like, read the last page and that's it. I skip a lot, well, I don't really skip a lot but I just skim and I kind of, unless it's a really good book, then I'll actually read it, but I'll usually just kind of go over it, and you can usually get kind of what's happening just from a few words every paragraph. I think another thing, sometimes I won't finish a book because it doesn't seem that interesting, but it's kind of in a different way and I actually *have* to read it, and so if I actually have to take the time, sometimes I just don't bother.
>
> *Margaret*: So if it's a demanding kind of book that requires a slower read than you like to give it, is that what you're saying?
>
> *Greg*: Not demanding like, um, like the words that I have to go look them up or anything--
>
> *Margaret*: No, no.
>
> *Greg*: The, the sentence structure, if it's a little bit different sometimes, I'll actually have to think about it. I don't like thinking when I'm reading.
>
> *Margaret*: So you like to just be a hot knife through butter and that's it.
>
> *Greg*: Yeah. But I think the books that I like the most, I actually do have to pay attention, like.
>
> *Margaret*: So you want it to be either undemanding or to give you some reward for the attention.
>
> *Greg*: Yeah. Cause if, if I'm reading it and I'm having to go, well, not slowly, but I'm actually having to read it, if I don't think it's going to go anywhere or if I think, oh, well, obviously this is going to happen, I'm not going to read the book.

When I asked him about his favourite book, he refused to be narrowed down to a single title. Asked for a selection, he mentioned the *Redwall* series by Brian Jacques, the Anne Rice vampire books, and a comedy-fantasy series by Robert Asprin.

> I used to really like John Saul, like, the horror books, but I've read almost all of them now and they all seem to follow the same pattern so I've kind of

> stopped those. Um, one of my favourite books is probably *Murder on the Orient Express.*

I suggested that he seemed to like to stick to authors and again got a rather contradictory response. At first he agreed, providing the author did not simply repeat a formula.

> *Greg*: Yeah, I stick to authors, but, like, if they're like the Hardy Boys or something, where they actually follow the same pattern, like, [in a falsetto voice] *The Hardy Boys are on vacation. Oh dear, something has happened. Oh, they go over, they find it. Oh dear, their life is threatened*, and just on and on, and I find myself, like they just follow a formula.
>
> *Margaret*: Right. My brother's favourite point about the Hardy Boys, although I don't know that it's the same now, was that the most wicked criminal they ever deal with is an intruder.
>
> *Greg*: [laughs] I know. It's just so stupid. Um, but, like the Robert Asprin books, they're not a series at all, they're all really different and there's, like, new characters.
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah, right, okay, I see. But once, you like, by the sounds of it, you like to get a new author that appeals to you because--
>
> *Greg*: Yeah. Like, I'll read an author, if I like the book, I'll read them all and then I have nothing to do for a couple of weeks and then I'll find another one and just go like that.

And yet, later, when we had reverted to talking about *Wolf* again, I mentioned that Gillian Cross's books were largely unlike each other. At this point, Greg raised a different issue.

> *Greg*: Sometimes that annoys me, like, I'll find a book and it's exactly, like, what I like to read and then I'll get another by the same author and it's totally different, you know, what is this?
>
> *Margaret*: On the other hand you don't like things to be predictable!
>
> *Greg*: Oh, yeah, no, well the plot not to be predictable, but the style, I kind of like the style to be the same and sometimes it's really different.

Greg seems to me to be almost an archetypal adolescent reader of a particular kind, outgrowing his old favourites, fussy and opinionated about what he will read next, ruthless in his demands of a book, and yet overall very positive about reading. He had a kind of restless iconoclasm, typical of some clever adolescents, and a taste for satire.

> *Greg*: I read the, I don't really read the newspaper. I, I think it's, I read the comics in the newspaper, I read the political cartoon, and that's it. And the only magazine I really read is *Mad*.

> *Margaret*: Isn't *it* predictable?
>
> *Greg*: Well, it is, actually, I think, after a while. Um, kind of like *Saturday Night Live*. It's really funny the first time you watch it and after about five times it's all kind of boring, so you get over it kind of quickly and then move on.

If Greg had liked *Wolf*, he might well have produced a very interesting account of it. However, he did not.

Greg's reading

Greg's comments on his first reading of the first four chapters were largely about issues of setting and character. He wondered at first if Cassy was a girl or a boy and was also slightly surprised to find that the book is set in contemporary times. Like most of the other readers, he commented on Goldie's strange ways. "I kind of wonder about Goldie, like, what kind of person she is, like, is she sort of, does she have, like, mental problems or something? She's lazy."

By chapter 3, he was settling into the book.

> Um, um, it's getting easier to read, I think. Like, I'm kind of falling into it and it's like, I found the sentence structure was a little bit strange before but now it's a little bit easier to read and it's going faster.

The Moongazer theme puzzled him.

> Well, um, more on this Moongazer thing. Um, I don't really understand exactly what he *does* when he goes to this, like, it just says combines all this stuff and helps people write and think better but it doesn't say how he does it.

At the end of Chapter 2, he simply ignored the dream, but by Chapter 4 he had clearly recognized that there was some sort of structural significance to this format. "Um, and I kind of wonder who the voice in her dream is. Just, you know, probably something the book is based around, that's what I would think."

On his second reading, Greg was able to appreciate plot details more quickly, but he was not impressed with the plausibility of the first chapter.

> I wonder when Nan got the yellow stuff, um, and why she would pack it in there and it wouldn't really make sense to just pack it in there, to, and not tell her anything about it, because wouldn't there be kind of be a chance that she'd just throw it out after a while, or something, or do what she actually did with it?

In his account of the second reading of the first four chapters Greg made regular use of different words indicating confusion. Describing Chapter 2, he said in part,

> You have your first reference to the explosive, and, I don't know, she just

> seems like the kind of person who would actually look, like, kind of sensible, could find what's in there or whatever--but she didn't. And then the dream that she has over and over and over again in the book, which, I don't know, it's like she's dreaming about remembering something that she can't quite remember. It doesn't make a lot of sense.

Greg protested quite indignantly about the colour of the semtex.

> The yellow stuff, I didn't get that until long into the book because I always thought of, like, plastic explosive to be grey.
>
> Because, you, like in all the movies and whatever, it's always grey so I really didn't understand that part at all.
>
> But, in, in movies and TV shows or whatever, you always see it and it's grey so I just thought it was plasticine or something the whole way and didn't understand it, but, if you do know what it is, it really explains a whole lot in the book.

He wasn't persuaded that Nan could slide the explosive away from Mick.

> *Greg*: And, after you know what happens, you kind of wonder, how did Nan get the plastic explosive away from him. Well, I think he must have had it (inaudible), how did she get it away from him and give it to Cassy and let her get away before he noticed or something. Not really believable.
>
> *Margaret*: Perhaps he was asleep.
>
> *Greg*: Yeah, probably. And there's a lot, like, she's worried about Nan. Like, she didn't do a whole lot about it, she just phoned once and that was about it. And, like, she just thinks about it as the yellow stuff too, like, um, if it is really yellow, like, I don't know, if I saw some grey stuff, I don't know, I think I'd probably be able to tell it wasn't plasticine, like, she says it's oily or whatever, but I would at least wonder why it was included in my bag of food.

Similarly, he was unimpressed with Mick's speed and efficiency at getting the explosive back.

> Well, she starts out writing the postcard and when she puts the address on it and writes about the yellow stuff, that would kind of, um, give it away to Mick and you would think that if he was this important bomber or whatever, um, he would find a way to get it back a little sooner.

Greg was also not very taken with the dreams.

> I, I thought the dreams got kind of boring by the end. Like, they were pretty repetitive. And there's, there's kind of a voice in it, like, where are you going, can I show you the way? And, um, hard to tell what that's supposed to be, if it's supposed to be, like, a wolf or her father or what, I don't know.

I asked him why he thought the voice might be a wolf and he answered without hesitation.

> *Greg*: Um, it reminds me of Little Red Riding, Little Red Riding Hood, like, I know a short cut kind of thing, can I show you the way. Just kind of pretending to be really nice. That's kind of like you'd think of a wolf to be.
>
> *Margaret*: Right. What about the other dreams, do they have Little Red Riding Hood?
>
> *Greg*: Well, kind of, you just, um, sort of get an image of, like, um, Cassy walking in her little mac, red, with the hood thing, in a pine forest in the middle of winter, is basically just it, I thought. I never really understood what an aconite was. I was going to look it up but I forgot.
>
> *Margaret*: It's a little yellow flower, grows just on the ground.
>
> *Greg*: Yeah, I figured it was kind of a flower, and I, I--
>
> *Margaret*: Its other name is wolf-bane.
>
> *Greg*: Oh!
>
> *Margaret*: And it's yellow.
>
> *Greg*: Okay.
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah, it just ties in.
>
> *Greg*: Yeah. Really, they seem to be emphasizing it the whole time and I didn't really understand why. I still really don't.

About the book as a whole, Greg was less than complimentary. He found the rescue scene unexciting. He continued to be annoyed about the colour of the semtex.

> Um, the book, I think it would have been better if they'd made it, well, or at least for me, if they'd made it grey stuff instead of yellow stuff, because I might have had a clue of figuring it out. It might have made it less interesting that way but, um, I wouldn't have, I wouldn't have been so confused the whole time. Um, and after a while I figured out what was going to happen, I mean, it was pretty obvious that her father was some sort of bomber, like, the first time they said the Cray Hill bomber, I mean, it kind of clued everything in.

When he stopped grumbling about this aspect of the plot, his other comments were more subtle.

> I, I like the stuff on the wolf, like, on the wolves, all the information and things.
>
> The Moongazer show . . . was kind of interesting, and more nursery rhyme stuff like, Who's afraid of the big bad wolf. And then the dreams the whole

> time, kind of wonder, and, by the end, kind of wonder, is she remembering, like, her father or something. And the very last dream when it's like, I don't know if it's a dream, it's written like the rest of the dreams were but it's like, I, I think it's Nan reading, like, the, the story of Red Riding Hood or something. Um, kind of strange. So she's writing a letter to her father but she doesn't seem to realize, I don't know, it's written kind of strange. It's almost as if it's pleading for a sequel to happen here. But it was a good book--once you figured out what the explosive was.

Some of Greg's most interesting points came right at the end of our discussion, long after we had finished talking about *Wolf*. We had begun to say good-bye when he picked up his copy and looked at the back.

> *Greg*: I didn't find the comments [on the blurb] very accurate. Like, I didn't think it was very splendid *or* daring. I didn't think it was, well, actually, not splendid, it was okay but it wasn't very daring. It was kind of absorbing because I didn't know what was happening but it wasn't, like, oh look, finally, it wasn't really scary or anything. Like, I don't find a whole [lot] of anything really scary any more. I, I usually look on a book, I think, for the reading level, like on the new books where they have reading level, grade, something or other. Do you know what this is intended for, like?
>
> *Margaret*: Secondary level, junior high, even lower senior high, I think.
>
> *Greg*: Is it? Whoa! I thought it was like, Grade 4.
>
> *Margaret*: Grade 4. You think so, do you?
>
> *Greg*: Yeah. This is the kind of thing I read in Grade 4. Sort of. Not exactly like that.
>
> *Margaret*: I daresay a Grade 4 could read it but certainly considerably older people have read it as well.
>
> *Greg*: Yeah.

Although Greg, for all his claim to skim pages of his books, had clearly registered many of the most important details in this story, these comments suggest that he did not find the final effect of the interweaving to be either complex or stimulating. Perhaps he was distracted by his certainty that the yellow substance could not be any kind of explosive. In any case, his irritation that he could be so misled over a factual misunderstanding and his astonishment that this book might be regarded as demanding were both vigorous.

Good enough reading

These four readers are clearly not unintelligent or utterly inexperienced in the processing of text. Although some of them made substantial errors of interpretation, I could in each case have organized a selective set of quotations that showed signs only of perception and insight.

It is important to make allowances for the artificiality of the situation. Being withdrawn from class to discuss a book with a researcher from the university is not an ordinary occurrence for a junior high student. I suspect they all felt some pressure to continue with the book, perhaps even to enjoy the book because their reading of it was such a marked event.

Nevertheless, they all did finish the book, and they all took note of many of the distinctive features of the book. Each, in a different way, commented positively on the book at one point or another and with greater or lesser conviction. And, although they made some serious mistakes of detail, everyone clearly grasped the main points of the plot, especially as the action escalated towards the end of the book.

It is also interesting, even with those readers who struggled with elements of the story, to take note of how many observations they made in common. This is a topic to which I will return later.

Having made these points, however, it is important to look at the kinds of errors these readers made, at the importance of such misinterpretations in the whole strategic task of reading the text, and at some theoretical issues which arise from these considerations.

In these transcripts we see many signs of the temporal nature of the reading process. This method is not a perfect window into a reader's head but it did supply some fascinating examples of transitory thoughts and references. A thought-out response collects reactions to a book in a kind of net of sense and association. The approach of this project to the observation of reading in action offers at least some idea of the kinds of temporarily considered ideas which are "the ones that get away" before any consciously organized consideration of the book takes place.

Bussis *et al.*, in their study of learning readers, offer a very valuable distinction in the temporal process of reading between accuracy and momentum. Accuracy involves issues of accountability to the text; momentum involves questions of anticipation and expectation to make it possible to move forward in the text. It seems to me that what we see here is readers involved in an active process of trading off the virtues of accuracy versus the compelling need for momentum. The nature of that trade-off varies from one reader to another, but I suggest that there are very strong hints in these readings (and in the ones which follow) that a major criterion of judgement is the rather basic one of "good enough."

An example from the pilot study will be more illuminating of what I mean by this phrase than a standard definition. Daniel was a Ph.D. student in the Faculty of Education with an interest in adolescent literature. He volunteered to take part in this project in its early stages. Not surprisingly, he was more self-aware and analytical than most of the adolescent participants; having said that, I think it is fair to comment that even he was surprised at what some of his reflections suggested.

In the very early stages of his first reading, Daniel was very explicit that there were many things he didn't understand but that he knew he had to keep going with the expectation that things would gradually fall into place. The idea of the squat troubled him from the first mention. He had never been to Britain and had no relevant image for this word, so he made do, both with what he could glean from the text and also (and crucially) with the idea that a kind of placeholder marked "setting" could stand in for the unvisualizable details.

Some of Daniel's early responses to the idea of the squat were as follows:

> Okay, then I also didn't understand what a squat meant at the bottom of page 10 cause it said it had been knocked down so to me that seemed like some kind of a makeshift, a makeshift housing thing, and that was confirmed, to me anyhow, yeah, top of page 11, where it says they gave her three cups of tea, blah, blah, blah, they told her and then in parentheses, *She helped Lyall and Robert set it up.* Again, I had this picture in my mind of one of these makeshift kinds of cardboard houses which people in, in refugee camps live in almost, but I somehow knew that wasn't right. But I'm having difficulty getting a picture of what this is like, okay? . . . What I found quite interesting was the little notice in the front, *Take notice that we live in this house, it is our home* and blah, blah, blah, *we intend to stay here*, which I thought was sort of a contradiction in the sense that you've got these people that don't have a pen or don't have a permanent house or are travelling all over the place and then have that kind of sign in the front. It became clearer as we went on where she seemed to understand that people like that do that to stake out their territory, so I caught on then what a squat meant. It meant that people, they find an abandoned place and they live there and they claim it as their own to protect it.

So far, we would seem to have a classic example of the text providing enough redundancy to support a reader learning a new concept. Daniel struggled with this idea, raising questions from time to time about why the interior of the house would be wrecked while the exterior was maintained. Why not raze the whole thing and start again? (The answer actually lies in a complicated mix of housing regulations and yuppie preferences for houses which look old on the outside and modern on the inside.) Again, Daniel was philosophical about his lack of clarity.

> I mean, why would one not just destroy the entire house and/or build something else on it rather than taking the effort to put concrete in the toilet or ripping up the floorboards to keep people out. So it's a cultural thing I'm not getting. . . . You know, I mean I just don't understand that. But it's fine, I accept it.

Later again, in our discussion of the book as a whole, Daniel returned yet again to the squat and revealed yet another element in his particular balance of accuracy and momentum in his pursuit of the story.

> *Daniel*: What's funny is, I know in my mind I was picturing that incorrectly but I couldn't change the picture. . . . Intellectually I knew that what I was picturing about the inside of this house wasn't what was. Mine was much too bungalowy, you know, it was too much 1950s bungalow. And I knew that wasn't right but somehow I couldn't replace it. . . . All through the whole book, I know it's not right but I'll never get it out of my mind. . . . Never.
>
> *Margaret*: Well, yet, just look at the description. It's actually fairly precise.

> *When she turned the corner, the road ahead of her looked unreal, as if the tall shabby houses were painted on cardboard.*
>
> *Daniel*: Mmm hmm. Ok I recognize, I can tell, I knew. I could picture that van. But it doesn't matter.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Daniel*: When you forget about that, what you're told to think, and get into the other stuff, picturing people in that space, what I picture is what I first pictured. . . . And the bizarre part is, I even knew that there was a little camp-type stove on the floor, but not in my mind! When they were cooking, it was on a stove. You know, until I just once in a while would make the shift to, okay, it's not there, it's here.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Daniel*: Right? It's very, it's very, it's very strange.
>
> *Margaret*: And yet it didn't stop you getting the essence of the book?
>
> *Daniel*: Not at all! It made no difference whatso--really. It didn't make a difference because this book isn't about that setting.

I have quoted this exchange at such length because I think it raises a particularly important issue. Daniel here is clearly talking about his set of schemata for interiors, especially kitchens. But this is far from a "textbook" or unproblematic application of a schema. Even in as artificial a situation as the one set up by the research study, Daniel is, in some essential ways, proceeding in some haste. The momentum of the story appears to require him to supply a quick picture of the squat and its kitchen. When he stops to think about it, the inaccuracy of this picture is readily apparent by the slightest reference to the actual text. However, in many significant ways, this inaccuracy doesn't matter. Not only does it not matter during the original reading, it continues to linger long after checking the text should have cleared it up.

What I think we see here, quite explicitly in Daniel's account of this process, is an example of "good enough" reading--reading for the nonce, for the moment, in order to accumulate detail to the point of critical mass. Just as an enlarging snowball does not stop to inspect the debris it collects as it rolls down the hillside, so a reading, maybe but not necessarily especially in its stage of escalating momentum, uses what comes mentally to hand.

Daniel gives a clear example of how arbitrary a reader's associations may be. The behaviour of the mental images a reader draws upon may also be described as arbitrary. In the case of the "bungalowy" interior, Daniel was quite clear about how difficult he found it to get rid of his inappropriate image.

Hami, on the other hand, struggled with the idea of Robert as butler, found it unworkable and dropped it. As far as his transcript shows, the idea disappeared leaving very little residue.

Such contradictions seem to me to be likely to abound in the fleeting, temporal process of making sense of words on one page after another. "Good enough" is a very personal call. Brenda's version of Mick as the hider as well as the seeker of the semtex was very difficult to make coherent but it seems to have been good enough to support her as she focused on other aspects of the text such as the role of the Red Riding Hood motif. Greg's misunderstanding over the colour of the semtex proved to be a failure of repertoire at one level but it did increase his curiosity about the workings of the plot and fuelled a particular kind of reading of the book. His was a slightly different form of misapprehension but his decisions as he read still involved issues of momentum and accountability.

The issue of "good enough" begs the question of "good enough for what?" Insofar as we can disentangle the workings of the minds of these readers, at least one possible answer would seem to be: "good enough to keep the reader engaged in the world established by the fiction." I suspect that an equivalent pragmatic basis would be involved in evaluating what is "good enough" in other kinds of non-fiction reading, but that is simply speculation on my part. The illocutionary force of story-telling (that is, the active function of the speech act involved) is to establish a fictional or virtual world and the gauge for indicating what is good enough to work for the reader is calibrated accordingly.

Readers have different trade-off points between the importance of accuracy and the importance of momentum. Bussis *et al.* found this to be true of their learning readers; some examples of different balancing points will show in subsequent accounts of readers of *Wolf*.

Prior and passing theories

Donald Davidson, the philosopher of language, has suggested that our conversations operate on the basis of a multi-layered assumption of the capacities and intentions of our interlocutor. He makes a distinction between prior theories and passing theories.

> For the hearer, the prior theory expresses how he is prepared in advance to interpret an utterance of the speaker, while the passing theory is how he *does* interpret the utterance. For the speaker, the prior theory is what he *believes* the interpreter's prior theory to be, while his passing theory is the theory he *intends* the interpreter to use. (1986, 442)

Davidson goes on to suggest,

> What must be shared for communication to succeed is the passing theory. For the passing theory is the one the interpreter actually uses to interpret an utterance, and it is the theory the speaker intends the interpreter to use. Only if these coincide is understanding complete. (Of course, there are degrees of success in communication; much may be right although something is wrong. This matter of degree is irrelevant to my argument.) (1986, 442)

He continues, "[M]ost of the time prior theories will not be shared and there is no reason why they should be." (1986, 443)

Davidson is talking about oral conversation, and his description has been attacked and/or refined by other philosophers who argue, among other things, that he does not allow for enough interaction between the speakers to settle points of disputed understanding on the spot (Hacking, 1986), or that he pays too much attention to malapropisms and other divergences from standard speech and not enough attention to the basis of a common language which speakers share in ordinary unmarked conversation (Dummett, 1986).

Davidson's emphasis on a form of one-way communicative attempts actually makes his account more rather than less relevant to a description of reading, in my view. Thomas Kent reinforces that opinion in his account of Davidsonian theories of interpretation.

> Prior theories--the guess a speaker makes about how her utterances may be interpreted and the guess a listener makes about how to interpret an utterance--never match precisely, for speaker and listener can never know with certainty the hermeneutic strategy the other intends to employ in a particular communicative situation. We can never know precisely how someone will interpret what we say, nor can we be certain in advance about the accuracy of our interpretation of another's words. Because the prior theory constitutes only a starting place for interpretation, it is necessary but not sufficient for effective communicative interaction. More important than the prior theory, the passing theory constitutes the hermeneutic strategy that we actually employ when we communicate. (1993, 46)

In Daniel's prior theory of what he might reasonably anticipate from Gillian Cross, there was clearly no place for the idea of a squat because he had never heard of such a thing. Because he is so explicit in his description of his mental processes, we can see him working out the potential of the meaning as he moves through the text. Davidson's vocabulary gives us a useful way to describe Daniel's achievement: he developed a passing theory about squats which enabled him to keep reading with the feeling that he knew *enough* to make sense of the story. The legal basis of squatting was important enough to him that he devoted some energy to working it out, though he was still left with some areas of confusion. As Kent helpfully describes it,

> Once communication takes place--once a speaker becomes satisfied that the listener has interpreted her discourse so that further discourse is unnecessary and once a listener becomes satisfied that her interpretation is close enough to the message the speaker intends--the passing theory, in a sense, disappears to become part of a prior theory that may or may not be used in future communicative situations. (1993, 47)

With reading, of course, the "speaker" is not present at the moment of communication, and the reader is perhaps able to be freer in his or her interpretation of what is "close enough to the message the speaker intends." Daniel's image of the squat's interior was an error his passing theory could encompass, even though he was aware of it as mistaken. In terms of spontaneous and automatic concept activation, Daniel was perhaps at the mercy of his own prior theories about domestic interiors. In any case, what we can see happening in his reading is a decision that this image was "good enough." "This book isn't about that setting." There is a strong feeling in Daniel's remarks that "it will have to do."

Because of the temporal discontinuity of the writer's and the reader's acts of communication, the reader gets to be judge and jury on what exactly is "good enough" in a particular reading. Clearly, it is difficult for anyone else to get inside what another reader decides to do with a text. We cannot legislate Daniel's mental image of the bungalow, or stop Hami from registering the size of the house long before he takes in its dilapidated nature, so that the idea of the butler gains at least some temporary plausibility for him. We can tell Brenda she is wrong about Mick's role in the hiding of the semtex, but we cannot stop her using this idea to sort out the plot *as she reads*. And yet, I am reluctant to follow this reader-centric road to the obvious end, where every reading is as good as every other if it is "good enough" for the individual concerned.

Triangulation

Davidson offers at least one possible route away from this madhouse of idiosyncrasy and solipsism. Unfortunately, his suggestions about what he calls triangulation were made in an unpublished manuscript and we must rely on the interpretation of Thomas Kent to make them clear. In an essay about Davidson's unpublished paper, "The Measure of the Mental," Kent offers suggestions which shed considerable light on possible relationships between a good enough reading and a justifiable reading.

According to Kent,

> For Davidson, the intimate and seemingly subjective knowledge that each of us possesses about our own mind arises only through triangulation with the other, other language users and other objects that constitute our shared world. Therefore, human subjectivity alone--in the sense of our subjective knowledge concerning our internal and non-public mental states--cannot account for the propositional attitudes we hold about the world. In order to hold propositional attitudes, we must communicate; for without other language users and without a shared world, no propositional attitudes could occur at all. (1993, 49 - 50)

Kent helpfully applies this account of language use to the activity of reading.

> In order to interpret a text, we require a reader, other readers, and a text. These three elements obviously correspond to the three apices of Davidson's communication model where the text assumes the place of an object in the world, a reader assumes the place of a language user, and other readers assume the place of other language users. As we read, we formulate passing theories in order to align our sense of what we are reading both with interpretations held by others and with the language in the text itself. Although these passing theories never match precisely, they nonetheless allow us to interpret well enough the meaning in a text by triangulating among what we know, what the text says, and what others say about it. (1993, 53)

I want to look at the role of the other readers in this triangulation because they seem to me to provide some kind of guard against the most free-wheeling form of individualistic "good enough" interpretation. In the course of the interviews with the student readers, I obviously represented the other readers of *Wolf* in any discussions. However, I do believe that the temporal arrangements of the sessions bore at least some relationship to the temporal nature of much unmarked, private reading. Beyond asking the students to give me a retrospective play-by-play of what had occurred to them while reading each of the first four chapters, I contributed virtually nothing to the accounts of the first 34 pages. I even took notes, partly for insurance purposes but partly to give me something to do which would reduce the social pressure for me to contribute to the conversation. There are pages and pages of transcript of the readings of the first four chapters where I say nothing but "Okay," or "Please read the next chapter now," or "Are you talking about page 10?" These pages in many ways represent monologues with interruptions for management and organizational purposes only, and, to a degree, I believe they offer at least a facsimile of some aspects of untriangulated reading. A reader reading silently is not obliged to justify decisions or defend what is good enough. These readers, talking to me, were obviously constrained by a number of factors: their wish to do themselves credit and not make fools of themselves, their anxiety to be helpful and produce the kind of material that would be useful to me, the limitations on their own ability to articulate what was happening to them mentally. Even so, I believe the transcripts of the actual readings offer enough of a view of partially untriangulated reading at least to make the concept visible to us.

I am emphasizing that such reading can only be partially untriangulated, however undirective the format, because I think there is a very important element in this idea of triangulation which Kent has not discussed.

Kent suggests that our reading is affected by the readers with whom we are triangulating.

> In place of the consensual and authoritative interpretation allowed by the interpretive community, we have a range of possible interpretations that are more or less acceptable depending on the other readers with whom we are triangulating. If we are triangulating with freshman students, our passing theory certainly would be less complex than the passing theory we would employ when communicating with a . . . specialist. Both passing theories would be acceptable, however, although one would be clearly less complex than the other. By appealing to the formulation of a passing theory, we do not need to invoke something like an interpretive community in order to explain how interpretations may differ; interpretations differ because we triangulate differently in different situations. (1993, 54)

Kent says that Fish's interpretive communities are too rigid and monolithic; that passing theory offers a flexible and time-based alternative explanation. There is much that is attractive about this description of contingency and transience. When I made a serious study of my own reading of *Dangerous Spaces* by Margaret Mahy, I devoted a great deal of attention to textual and compositional elements of the text; when I started to read it aloud to my daughter, who at that time was exactly the same age as the recently-orphaned heroine, I found the affective charge of Anthea's terrible situation to be entirely different from what I had felt in my more detached readings.

This description leaves something out, however. Kent himself observes,

> We attempt to interpret the text in terms of a passing theory we construct from our knowledge about ourselves and the world--knowledge we derive from previous triangulation. (1993, 53)

As we adjust our prior theories to take account of new passing theories, however, we must surely store some of the impact of the other readers with whom we have previously triangulated. Bruner, talking about memory, suggested that the rememberer's interlocutor can be "present in the flesh or in the abstract form of a reference group." (1990, 59) Part of the difference in what seems "good enough" for one reader as opposed to another may well lie in the internalized reference bank of previous encounters with other readers.

This account would certainly help to explain why Daniel's references to the text were much more precise and analytical than the other readers. In the full transcript of his reading, it is clear that he made factual errors as he read, went off on tangents, changed his mind, felt emotions specific to his own role as an adult observing Cassy set off into the perilous streets of London--in other words, his passing theory contained many decisions that were "good enough" to keep him reading but not considered or critical reactions. Nevertheless, his reading was more detailed, more specific to the actual words on the page, more thoughtful than the readings of the school students who in some cases were twenty years his junior. In his world knowledge of London, Daniel was probably as ignorant as many of the younger readers; nevertheless his extra years of reading and his extra years of participating in particular groups of readers (in his case, university professors and students, and school teacher colleagues) seemed to have an impact. It does not take too much adaptation of Kent and Bruner's terms to make a useful explanation of this phenomenon. Daniel, in assimilating at least some of the more valuable elements of previous passing theories and previous triangulations, had an internalized representation of other readers and their expectations which helped to ground his own reading more specifically in the details of event and language use which make up the book, *Wolf*.

The younger readers are nowhere near as far along this path as Daniel, and in many ways it showed in their reading. Their assumptions were often more artless and naive. When Daniel and I moved from talking about the specific 34 pages to talking about the book as a whole, the effect in the transcript is fairly seamless. With the younger readers, however, I perceive a shift of tone as I joined the discussion and started to contribute questions: representing the other readers, I had been present all along but as I started to ask questions my representative role in the triangulation process became more prominent.

The junior high readers were not wholly rootless or newly-fledged as they came to *Wolf*. Just about all of them made mention of other readers with whom they share titles and exchange opinions. The internalized standards of their previous conversations about reading would play the same role in the minds of these readers as it seemed to do in Daniel's mind. The difference was partly one of simple quantity and partly one of the nature, quality and rigour of their previous conversations. But earlier encounters with other readers and earlier establishment of what interpretations may be defensible would seem to constitute a plausible element in the creation of a reader's repertoire of conventions and strategies.

It seems possible also that such previous conversations may be activated selectively, according to their perceived relevance for the reading at hand. These students were in a reading situation for which they probably had little precedent. Some would activate responses which they had found helpful in school discussions; this happened to a strikingly greater degree with the high school students as we will see later. The junior high students were less inclined to do so. This would partly be accounted for by the fact that, in Grade 8, they had much less of such experience to draw on.

The pilot study undergraduates provide a different angle on some of these questions. They were older than the school students but, for the most part, younger than Daniel. However, most of them had clearly participated in very different kinds of literary conversations. In some cases, at least, their idea of a "good enough" reading was one which equipped them to bluff an instructor with a minimal amount of work. After they had handed in all their notes and tapes, we held a class discussion of *Wolf* which produced many different reactions to the book itself; some liked it, others hated it. Because of the nature of the task they had just finished, they naturally talked rather more about their own reading processes than one might otherwise expect in such a conversation. One very illuminating comment came from a young man who had taken note of the textual markings of the dream fragments: the asterisks, the dots, the indentations. He read the first dream carefully, he said, decided it was contributing nothing to the plot, and from that point onward, when he reached another dream he cheerfully turned the page without reading a single word.

Is such a reading "good enough"? Who gets to ask such a question and in what circumstances? This reader clearly gave priority to momentum over any form of accuracy, but it is probably truer to say that he never entered into the implied contract between the author and the reader at any point. If "good enough" means "good enough to maintain the engagement with the story," there is every chance that this particular reader never reached this stage at any point during the entire reading.

The text is not neutral in terms of decision-making over the balance between accountability and anticipation. Some texts dictate that balance point very precisely. On the very rare occasion when I read Milton's poetry, I find that the getting the balance right almost invariably involves reading aloud to set the pace. On the other hand, if I read an exciting book in a familiar genre, some of my gestures towards accountability are token indeed as I race to reach the conclusion.

The format of the text is not transparent either. Momentum, in particular, is strongly affected by the form of production. The rhythm of reading a nineteenth-century novel would be experienced very differently by a reader who read the weekly instalment and a reader who waited for the three-volume novel. Similarly, a reader who encounters a poem in a hypertext framework, with allusions and associations a mere click of the mouse away, may well develop a different sense of momentum. The readers in this study tackled a conventional novel, produced in the conventional paperback format, with chapters clearly separated, typefaces altered with discretion at key points, and a set of conventional markers and pointers at the disposal of the author. Cross has made good use of her repertoire of conventions in this book, in my opinion, but there is nothing revolutionary about the way the story is made available for the reader. This is a text which makes the reader's role quite clear.

The reader who skipped all the dreams, however, is a reminder that in any contest between the demands of the text and the requirements of the reader, the reader is, in a very real sense, the one with all the immediate power. This young man will probably persuade himself that *Wolf* is a book he has read, despite the fact that he chose to ignore a major element in the book's structure. The writer has no power to force the reader to take the terms of the book seriously. If engagement does not work, coercion is no real substitute.

This reader, and some of his classmates, are a testimonial to the idea that previous conversations about reading can contribute to a prior theory that is corrupt and useless in its primary provisions. If the object of reading something is to get it over with, a certain kind of conversation can be maintained afterwards. Enough of such experiences can create a pattern whereby a reader has no real understanding of what is "good enough" for himself or herself; the task remains something external to the mind of the reader by any meaningful account.

In the case of the junior high readers I have just described, there was nothing so cynical as the behaviour described by my honest undergraduate subject. The students wanted to like the book and, by and large, they found at least something to like about it. How such liking may lead to ways of thinking about a fiction is the subject of the next set of descriptions.

Chapter 6

"I FELT ANGRY AT SOMETHING": AFFECTIVELY ENGAGED READING

To some of the readers, one in Grade 8 and two in Grade 11, the issue of emotional connection with the story seemed to be paramount. Their reasons for this attitude, as far as they can be ascertained in this kind of project, were different: one identified with Cassy, one disagreed very profoundly with Cassy's opinions about the world, and one had just come through a personal experience which had much in common with Cassy's story. Whatever the cause, what came across in much of their transcripts, is the idea of empathetic engagement.

Candace--Grade 8

Candace stood out from the other junior high readers for several reasons. Her reading of *Wolf* was, in many ways, larger, more detailed, more comprehensive. Her responses to characters, situations, and plots were much more affectively engaged. She paid some attention to the ways in which the text was actually assembled, but her main reaction was one of emotional identification, particularly with Cassy.

Candace reads a huge number of books. She takes three buses to and from school every day and suggests that she may read as much as one and a half or two books a day. Her favourite authors are Lloyd Alexander and Paul Gallico (writing about cats), and she has read *The Secret Garden* a total of 23 times (she has a list of her very favourite titles where she records readings; it contains *The Secret Garden*, *The Sky is Falling* by Kit Pearson, and the Lloyd Alexander titles of *The Chronicles of Prydain*.)

With Candace, as with some of the other junior high readers, there is very much a sense of a Janus-faced reader, looking both forwards and backwards. She said she reads far too much; she gets in trouble with her mother and she feels her math mark is suffering. Some of what she reads, she has clearly outgrown.

> I like to read all kinds of books, I guess, including *Baby-sitters Club* and *Sweet Valley Twins* because I love making fun of them. . . . And (inaudible) being critical and nasty to their, to their authors and stuff like that.

She returned to this theme later, criticizing the formula nature of the *Baby-sitters* series.

> *Candace*: If you're reading *The Baby-sitters Club*, you can tell I have a major aversion to this, these series, you know. I think, I think those are about fit for Grade 4 people.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Candace*: I still read them because I hate them so much. I'm looking for one where something bad happens to one of them. (laughs) I haven't found it yet.

> *Margaret*: *Claudia and the Long Goodbye* or *the Sad Goodbye*.
>
> *Candace*: *Sad Goodbye*. Everything works out so well.
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah. True.
>
> *Candace*: I'm looking for one that, that, where--I want one of them to die. Stacey has diabetes, I'm waiting for her to drop dead of diabetes.
>
> *Margaret*: Don't stand on one leg.
>
> *Candace*: I know.

Candace kept returning to the topic of the *Baby-sitters* like someone feeling a broken tooth with a sore tongue; her sister doesn't read as much as Candace but when they do talk about books they discuss "how stupid *Baby-sitters Club* books are."

From time to time, on the other hand, she sets herself a real challenge.

> *Candace*: I, I've read Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. It was rather interesting. I chose it because it was really thick. (laughs) It was kind of, um, way over my head.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Candace*: And I remember thinking that, that a lot of the children's authors these days seem to be more, um, comprehensive than he was.
>
> *Margaret*: What do you mean by comprehensive?
>
> *Candace*: No, not comprehensive, that's not a good word, but, but, um, more in touch with the world than his, than he was, but of course he lived I don't know how many years ago, so that's, that's obviously going to enter into it.

Candace is frustrated by an inadequate supply of new titles to satisfy her substantial demand. She has read just about everything that appeals to her in her school library and she doesn't get to her local public library very often. She has one friend at school with whom she occasionally discusses and even more occasionally exchanges books. Her description of how this friend's opinion affects her indicates that she has a tendency to become very engaged in the stories she reads. I asked her if talking to her friend influenced how she felt about a book.

> Um, yeah, I guess, I guess it's sort of influenced what I start reading, like, if Roberta says this is a really good book, then I'll be thinking, well, here comes a really good book. Whereas if she says it's not very good, then I'm going to, I'm not going to start with a very good attitude about it. Sometimes I read them because they're not very good books, something to do, or because I'm bored (inaudible). . . . But, but I figure, I guess that, um, it, it influences the first couple of thoughts I have but after, like, when I, when I start reading I get, I get really, um, immersed in it, I can't hear anything any more. . . . So I don't really, I don't really think about it after that, what anyone else has said

> about it. I just want to finish the book, then I'll go, Why did this person think it was such a bad book, I thought it was really good.

I think all of the other junior high readers already described would have recognized this capacity to be swept up in a book; all of them described experiences of being totally absorbed in a text. The difference with Candace was that she seemed to be more successful in engaging herself with the events and characters of *Wolf*.

Candace's reading

Candace articulated many associations with her own experiences from the very outset. Her first remark on the first reading of the first chapter was this: "Okay, this, the beginning of it, it kind of made me really, it reminded me of when I'm in bed at night and I hear something outside."

From the beginning she took a great dislike to Goldie. Her first comment to this effect came as early as page 4: "I started to think, to feel, um, dislike against her mother and a sense of unfairness."

Candace very readily made connections with her own life.

> And then here, she's looking at her, her father's picture. . . . And then she, she puts it into, on top of the postcards . . . in the suitcase, and I remember thinking about my family because my mum, my parents are divorced.

For the most part, Candace did not remark on more literary or constructed aspects of the book, but she did recognize a familiar figure at the end of Chapter 1. Typically, this came after a description of her own emotional commitment to an idea in the story.

> And then the last thing, on page 9, where it talks about the gentleness, where she says, You're a good girl, that made me feel terrible. Um, I hate being told I'm a good girl. And then the last thing I remember thinking about was at the very end of page 9, the short determined figure. I remember seeing that in a lot of books.

Candace empathized vividly with Cassy's growing fatigue and hunger as she searched for Goldie and kept making associations with her own experience.

> I just felt really, really mad. Because if my mother had done anything like that I would be really, really mad at her but that must have been a bit different because I've lived with my mother all my life.

On the other hand she was not insensitive to the use of language or to the nuances of description. She picked up the legal language in the notice on the door and said it sounded like how the police read you your rights. She responded to the mirror room as well, noting the description and connecting it with her own emotions, as usual.

> And then, it says it was like walking into an infinite forest full of fireflies. That made me think, there's a scene in *The Phantom of the Opera* where there's

> just candles everywhere. I thought of that. And, then all this talking about dozens of pieces of cloth draped round the mirrors, made me feel like I was in some kind of type of imprisonment, closed, closed in a small dark area.

Candace disliked Lyall as well as Goldie. She felt threatened by the image of this tall stranger sitting by the heroine's mother and she disliked the way he took over Nan's letter ("when he reads it aloud I felt violated because it's Nan's.")

The first dream confused her.

> And then at the end, that was sort of, this is sort of confusing, I read, I read the last paragraph before these, these little three stars a couple of times because I didn't, I thought this was some kind of poem, but I read it and it made me think of spring.

Candace showed many signs of being more adept than the other junior high readers at organizing details into a pattern. She noticed well and remembered well, and she made connections with some confidence, even when her articulation of such connections was a little hazy.

> And then, she said . . . . talk about keep the wolf away from the door and the title is *Wolf*, and I wondered what, what that meant, if it meant that something about, about her stomach, or, or a real wolf at the door, I don't know if they were going to feed him or something. Um, and she, it says, she made a neat sandwich with her bacon and fried bread, on top of 22, and it sort of was like a, a paradigm, with its reference to a neat, neat little organized thing in the bunch of rubbish, like from her old, old life.

Like many readers, she did not know what a winter aconite was, but she picked up at least some of the resonance of the image.

> Um, this threatening, uneasy memory, bottom of 23, winter, winter aconite. That, I think, sounds to me like a flower or something, I'm not sure what it is, so I was sort of, I'm confused about that and uneasy about it because, you know, it's sort of threatening.

As she worked through the third and fourth chapter, Candace kept commenting on her own personal emotions.

> And then Nan doesn't come to the phone and I felt angry about that.
>
> Then, bottom of 27, never put your own address on a postcard, um, it was like, like she was thinking about not doing it, and it seemed to me like if she did that, it would be abandoning her chances of hearing from Nan again, and I felt sort of lost again.
>
> It says, it was like talking to a nagging child, and that reminded me of my cousins because I look after them a lot and that's exactly what they sounded like and I, I started to get really impatient with Goldie.
>
> Every time, every time they start talking about Lyall, I feel intimidated and

> small because they described him as a large person.
>
> They talk, playacting, Cassy at the bottom of 30, she ought to have guessed that Goldie wouldn't be doing real work and I felt, I felt sort of glad to know that she still wasn't doing anything so that I could still dislike her.
>
> Again and again I keep feeling frustrated with, with these people because they're supposed to be the commanding ones, you know, adults are supposed to be in charge there.

As well as these affective responses to the book, Candace mentioned more than once that something was confusing her, a more cognitive comment. By the time she gets to the second dream sequence, she is describing both reactions.

> Um, then, then they're talking about the yellow flowers of aconite and everything, and it seems to me like this is coming into her mind from someone else far away who's seeing these things, and I thought of another book that I've read but I don't remember what the book was. I felt helpless. Oh yeah, and then it says, Shall I show you the path, we could play a little game. And I felt, I felt angry at something, at this, at this thing, where they're, where they're asking these questions in italics. I didn't quite understand it.

On her second reading, Candace continues to monitor her emotional reactions. Knowing the reason behind Cassy's sudden departure seems to sharpen her involvement.

> I was thinking that before I had felt angry at Nan but now I felt sort of sorry for her because she, um, because I knew why that she was making Cassy leave.
>
> Um, then they're talking about, she's folding the clothes and making them very precise and sharp and, um, I felt, I felt sort of like lost, like I was being abandoned, like I felt like Cassy was being abandoned.
>
> At the bottom of page 6, Nan starts speaking in a strange offhand way, thinking of something else and I felt sort of scared cause I knew what it was that she was thinking of. Um, then, for one terrifying second, on page 7 in the middle, it says Nan, Nan hesitated, and I felt, um, like, Cassy, it says Cassy gripped the edge of the table and gripped it hard or whatever, um, I felt like I was falling, sort of, seems like falling. Then on the next page, she's looking at the photograph and I started feeling sorry for her, this time that she didn't know what her father was like. I felt, um, angry at her father because I know what happened at the end.
>
> She goes in through the door, on 14, and it's (inaudible) into this room with the candles and everything, and I felt, I felt squashed, like if I had been in that room I would have felt very squashed. And on the bottom of 14, she was sitting on a mattress in one corner like a doll in a glass case. I remember feeling a little bit sorry for Goldie because, because she didn't really seem to have any life.

Several times, Candace remarked on Cassy's stiff and formal approach to life and commented how much she changed by the end of the book. She was also beginning to make some connections regarding the dreams.

> On the next page, 18, they have these, this dream and then I realized why, why they have this because at the beginning it says that she, she never had any dreams, and so now she starts having dreams and I just, just realized the significant, significance of that.

It was unusual for Candace to talk of the book in terms of its constructed nature, but in her reference to "they" in this comment, it is clear she is taking at least a small step back to consider the intelligence that created and arranged the elements of the text in a particular order.

Candace was very sensitive to many of the linkages in the book. She talked about Robert and his lists.

> Um, then he makes this joke about the wolf at the door and, and all the way through the next couple of pages they're talking about, um, what spider ambushes its prey instead of spinning a web, and moths you find in, um, granaries, and it's, it's all about wolves. And, and I, I understood that, like, it was all sort of coming together, you know? Um, and then, bottom of 23, winter aconites, a threatening uneasy memory. Um, I'm wondering if she actually had that memory, like, if that had ever actually happened, cause it's still not clear in the story about her, about the dream.

By Chapter 4, Candace is beginning to revise her opinion of Lyall and Goldie.

> Robert's calling Goldie and Lyall idiots for rolling around cause they might mash the masks, and again I keep thinking that they're so, they're so immature and childish, but yet they're not, they're they're really pretty grown up.

The symbolism of Cassy modelling the wolf out of the semtex was not lost on Candace and she merged this response into a comment on the second dream.

> It seems so ironic that she's, um, making a wolf out of the, the very thing that's going to be the cause of all this, um, danger at the end. Um, then she's, she's dreaming again about these flowers and this something or someone, the slow enticing murmur that went on and on, and I just started hearing, like, a heartbeat, over and over again, and I felt really scared.

Describing her reaction to the book as a whole, Candace that said that for the first "eight or nine or ten" chapters, she was struggling, finding the story very hard to understand.

> But then it was one of the books that I enjoyed, that I liked, I enjoyed it, and after I read it, there were so many little things that suddenly seemed to just click in my mind cause there were so many things that don't make sense until the whole book's finished so-- But it was, it was a pretty good book, confusing but, but very good. It, it's like you had to think to read it instead of just, you know, *The Baby-sitters Club*, where it's just not very difficult.

Candace made a number of associations with the dream sequences. One reminded her of a book about a girl who was addicted to drugs and raped, "and this, this reminded me of part of that book because she was, um, talking to this guy in a park or someplace."

The dream that involved running to the cottage reminded Candace of her grandparents' farm.

> They have a very long driveway and there's bears. . . . So you have to run, like, like, I always get scared and I run the last way but I never knew how many more bends there were till I got to the cabin. Um, yeah, and then where it says, Or the next, or the next, and that's how I always feel.

She did not mention Little Red Riding Hood until she got to the dream on page 111 with the line, *Grandmother what big eyes you have.* At this point, however, she was able to make a link straight back to Cassy's meeting with Lyall.

> Um, the room looked the same, um, the fire flickered and this, *Grandmother what big eyes you have* from "Little Red Riding Hood." Lyall says that at the beginning of the book in Chapter, um, 2 or something. Um, and, and it's like, it said, it said the room looked the same but not the same, and that's again, like, is this, is it really still the same as it, is it really safe still?

Once the links with Red Riding Hood throughout the dream were pointed out, Candace was able to see connections, at first with just that fairy tale. Then, without prompting, she suddenly noticed more.

> And then again, *Grandmother what big eyes you've got.* Oh, and here! I've just noticed this, turn to page 122, Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? . . . There's again and again the wolf thing. It keeps coming out, how, how ironic it is that it's used in a children's nursery rhyme, but can be so terrible--terrifying and, and real.

I asked her how much of this kind of interweaving of nursery rhymes and fairy tales she had been aware of while actually reading, and she was quite clear about the answer.

> Throughout the, throughout the story I kept, I kept thinking this is, this is, wolf, this is, I've heard this before and I, I never quite got it. Now I'm going over my understanding a little bit more, like, if I had read this book without analyzing it, I wouldn't have got that bit, or I might have.

It seems fairly clear that throughout her reading, Candace's first preoccupation had been with her own emotional responses to the characters and the situation. Being a fairly observant reader, she had picked up and could recall a number of details, but it was not until she was pushed in conversation that she began to notice Cross's use of patterning. And yet, even without a full appreciation of the complexities at work in the text, she was aware that there was a great deal she could register only after she had finished the story.

Ed--Grade 11

Ed is a serious reader, in several senses of that word. He says he reads between an hour and an hour and a half every night. For at least some of the time, he does not distinguish between his school reading and his pleasure reading. At the time of our interview, for example, he had just tried to get interested in *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* by Roddy Doyle, and failed. His reading for school at this time was W.B. Yeats, and he said he would be quite happy to take the poems to read in bed.

> If I like it, what I'm studying . . . I don't make a distinction, you know, Keats and Yeats, I'll read it, Shakespeare, I'll read it, most, most of what we do in English. If I don't like what we're studying at that point, generally won't, I'll look at it as work. Um, but, so generally I don't make a distinction between heavy reading and light reading, I look at everything as sort of heavy reading in a way. I try to get a grip on people's views on life out there. (laughs)

Ed described a reading trajectory that took off in junior high. As a child, he registered a sense of accomplishment as he moved on to the more complicated Dr. Seuss books, and he described with great affection and detail a book about a dog and a chicken which he had loved as a child but finally lost. Through elementary school he read books such as the mysteries of Eric Wilson, but he finally reached the point of disenchantment with these simple stories.

> I got interested in philosophy and, and politics in junior high and so that sort of went, I didn't actually read philosophy, um, regularly, but I did, you know, look at politics and I started to edge towards non-fiction, that type of books.

Ed's brother, once a committed atheist, met and married a woman who was a strong Baptist, and became religious himself. Curiosity led Ed to read theology.

> So the summer of Grade 11, I (inaudible), I sort of went to the library and I started, you know, reading up on this. Um, my knowledge of the Bible, I knew a bit of it because we studied it in Grade 10 English as, you know, foundation for lots of good literature. But most of what theo--theologians were talking about I didn't know, you know, I, you know, I could piece together what they were saying but I didn't, but I couldn't connect the, the events with the Bible because I hadn't read it. Um, but, um, that, I sort of read that, you know, I found it interesting, I found their views interesting even if I didn't agree because they were so spread out.

This interest in theology lasted beyond the summer.

> But I, I came back to school this year and I was sort of talking to people who were more religious and I have a Unitarian friend now, um, and, um, we, you know, we end up talking about religion and things, and I, you know, she's basically, you know, it's emphasized my idea that the Bible's not necessary for religion, that all religions are in fundamental outline the same, exactly the same things, it's just the details and whether, you know, Jesus is the Son of God or whether he's just a guy or whether he's a prophet, it's all getting, you know, it's getting people, these creative discords when in fact, you can really worship anything and call it religious. Um, so, I've got, I've moved away

> from theology and I'm more interested in books that deal with, I mean, most books deal with human nature but I'm more interested in the ones that sort of emphasize it. Like, *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* ones. I find, do, I find they're really good, um ideas on the nature of the human mind and everything, the way it works. I mean Arthur Dent is probably the best character I've ever encountered. (laughs) Yeah, so, that's about where I am.

Ed made a couple of reference to Douglas Adams's books and said they were the only ones he knew that made him laugh out loud. This is not surprising when they are compared to the rest of his reading preferences which certainly veer towards the solemn: Shakespeare ("if I have time to sit down and work out the language"), Solzenitzyn, Shaw, Keats, Yeats. He reads some non-fiction "if it's something I'm interested in, like politics or social conditions, political freedoms." His taste in fiction runs along the same lines; he likes books about "individuals struggling against something . . . characters, um, imprisoned by society or rejected by society."

This particular taste, and also his enthusiasm for drama, led him to become very irritable on the subject of Cassy.

> I find characters like Cassy very annoying because they are not rejects of society and they don't attempt to understand society and why they're, it's because of the position that they're in.

Ed's reading

Ed's disapproval of Cassy arose early and lingered throughout his readings, causing him to comment over and over again on her straight-laced ways and narrow obedience to Nan. His second sentence describing the first chapter was this,

> Um, Cassy hit me as a relatively weak character, um, *Mind your own business*, or, she listens to Nan, *Mind your own business and you won't get your nose caught in my mousetrap.*

Ed's comments about Cassy's narrow-mindedness continued throughout his reading.

> I get the feeling that Cassy was a bit of a snob for disapproving of the, of the notice.
>
> She obviously has a very low opinion of Goldie: she's working, double exclamation point. Let's see. Goldie seemed very exuberant very, um, I don't think, I think Cassy, um, acts very conservatively, she, Goldie seems like a very warm person and I don't, I wasn't quite, I didn't understand why Cassy, um, had this negative attitude towards her, except that she is lazy. Cassy seems like a very private person as well, she backs away from Lyall. She doesn't know him very well so I guess that's understandable, but, um, she doesn't seem to be very willing to attempt to know him well.
>
> Cassy seemed to get more annoying as the chapter [4] went on. She said, *Playacting, she ought to have guessed that Goldie wouldn't be doing real work*, um, um, I think, I thought that was extremely unfair to Goldie which, when

> Cassy knew virtually nothing about what they were doing. She also seemed, she also annoyed me with her, when Goldie and Lyall were playing, she seemed, she also annoyed me there, she seems to think people should only work, you know, she's very, Cassy's very condescending towards Goldie, I found, she's saying, you know, as long as you keep her calm, get her to do what you tell her to.

Ed's irritation with Cassy continued in his second reading, sometimes fuelled by the unfair advantage that he now knew what was going to happen to her later on.

> Um, I got annoyed by Cassy asking questions. I'd be doing the same thing in her situation probably, but because I'd read the rest of the book I, I just found it useless!
>
> I never really thought about it but since I'm interested in going into acting I was really mad at Cassy's, *Playacting, she ought to have guessed that Goldie wouldn't be doing real work.* I, I think playacting is probably one of the best ways to teach kids; I don't think it's easy to connect with them.

This continuing annoyance with Cassy was one of the more clear-cut features of Ed's response to the book. Much of the rest of his reaction was more confused. He was sensitive to the way the book was constructed, but it appeared that he did not have sufficient information about fairy tales to make the links that would have helped him.

Ed's account of the dreams was so interesting that I pushed him to look at all the dreams in the book, after we had finished the second reading of the four chapters. His response is worth some elaboration.

In his first reading of the first dream, Ed said this:

> Um, the situation where, or in her dream, I, I assume this is a dream after she falls asleep. Um, um, it was also, it was a natural setting also brought it back to the idea of the title, the wolf, etc. She was in the forest. I'm not sure what winter aconites are, I've never seen those flowers. I don't know why she was picking the flowers . . . obviously they have some significance but I have no idea right now. It's fairly suspenseful.

His first reading of the second dream followed similar lines: an awareness of the puzzles but no suggestion about any possible key except the title of the book.

> Her dreaming again, when she slept into, slid into a dream. I was wondering what, who was saying, *Where are you going. Can I show you the way?* I'm not sure why but my impulse said it was Lyall saying it--or the, or the wolf that the title suggests. This might be the huskiness and the warm breath, it reminded me of a dog's breath or a dog's bark and, um, I was curious as to what would happen, this is the little game.

He was still struggling on the second reading of the first dream, although not as badly.

> I understood, um, the dream this time, the white aconites, that's the first, um, connection with the wolf, um, um, the aconites, that's a, that's a very vague connection originally that I would not, I suppose it gets, it gets more and more descriptive and concrete with the other dreams. I do think, she began to pick the flowers, is sort of, um, began to think about this, and I'm not sure why she's already thinking about it because she hasn't been introduced into the theories of it yet. I thought it was sort of maybe mystical or some connection or sort of, um (inaudible) science connection, psychic maybe.

In the second reading of the second dream, his inability to find a key to the imagery was troubling him.

> In the dream, um, there's the connection with the aconites. I, I wasn't sure about, *Where are you going? Can I show you the way?* Having read the, having read the rest of the book, I assume this is Mick Phelan in the dream, um, you know, you're going to recognize, um, that it's connected with the end of the book, her, in her, him saying that to her when she walks into the bedroom. But I didn't recognize *Shall I show you the path? We could play a little game.* Perhaps Mick Phelan said that at the end of the book, I don't remember him saying that.

When I asked Ed to look through the remaining dreams, he came up with an assortment of associations. The "dream with no pictures" on page 50 made him think of wickedness because she couldn't see.

> A person relies on seeing things in life. Um, I, if I can't see when something's going on, I tend to be uneasy, I think it's a natural human instinct because you don't know what's coming.

The thick hairs under her hand reminded Ed of his dog, and the next dream made him think of orienteering, of an occasion when he was about eight and had got lost. He added, "Um, but, um, this panicky, um, it does remind me of something else but I can't place it." By the next dream Cassy has reached the cottage and Ed was reminded of nightmares, though he found the description rather logical for a nightmare. He picked up the idea of running faster and faster without getting any closer and described a scene in a car where he had seen a bridge from many miles away and it had never seemed to get any nearer.

He was surprised, in the dream on page 96, that Cassy would knock twice when the door swung open anyway. Then he went on:

> *Ed*: The darkness seemed ominous. As a child I was extremely afraid of the dark, and would never go into a room where I couldn't see, you know, always (inaudible). *Come in*--that would make me run, probably even now it would. (laughs)
>
> *Margaret*: (laughs) Specially in italics, you mean?
>
> *Ed*: Yeah. (laughs) Yeah.

The source of some of Ed's struggles with the dreams was illuminated by his comments on the next dream, the one on page 111 where Cross actually includes the line, *Grandmother what big eyes you have*. Ed knew it was a fairy tale but could not identify which one.

> Here, this, I, I assume this is a connection with the room that Goldie and Lyall were in, um, the room with all the mirrors and the reflections of the candles. I guess this is where it comes from. Um, it doesn't really remind me of anything except maybe the house of mirrors at Klondike Days, walking around and seeing yourself in a thousand places at once. The, um, story, of course, is the, um, *Grandmother what big eyes you have*, related to the, it related to the, to a fairy tale. I found it almost comical, picture the wolf in a nightcap, you know, with the sheets, kind of, sort of lying there, with this, you know, bangs and everything, it's really a cartoon wolf, so, um, I was amused, well, the actual impression is not all that amusing but I found this statement funny.

It seems clear to me that the wolf Ed is describing here is a television cartoon wolf. I think I have actually seen the same one, the bangs that Ed mentions being Betty-Grable type rolled up bangs peeking out from under the frilly nightcap, with the sheet pulled up to the snout. Ed, in this comment, clearly recognizes that his pictured wolf is emotionally inappropriate, funny rather than frightening, though it is clear from his earlier comments that he is registering the escalating terror in the dreams.

The dream sequence on page 127 is the one with the scream and this reminded Ed of two scenes from his childhood; one when his puppy had bitten him and one when he was stuck in the back seat of a car with a bulldozer backing up towards him.

> It wasn't slowing down and I was sort of shouting because, you know, this thing would have crumpled our car with me in it, right, I didn't have enough room to get out, so, um, that reminded me of, sort of (inaudible) panic, it was, it reminded me basically of any time that I felt panic, extreme fear for my life.

Ed is registering the emotional force of the dream sequences without any doubt, but he could not be specific about any fairy tale references. This became even clearer as he talked about the last dream segment.

> *Ed*: I couldn't see the connection, Cassy being almost fourteen, why Nan would be reading to her about, you know, the big bad wolf, not the big bad wolf, I forget the name of the story.
>
> *Margaret*: The big bad wolf's "The Three Little Pigs," isn't it?
>
> *Ed*: Yeah, no, this is the other one, I suppose.
>
> *Margaret*: *Grandmother what big eyes you have.*
>
> *Ed*: Yeah.
>
> *Margaret*: That's "Little Red Riding Hood."

> *Ed*: All right. Um, yeah, I, I didn't really connect with that, um, I couldn't, I couldn't find any connection myself (inaudible).

This gap in Ed's repertoire put him at a disadvantage in trying to work out the resonances of the dreams. It seems likely that a better grounding in fairy tales would have stood him in good stead because, in many ways, he was very sensitive to the workings of the structure. His opening remark about the book made a link between the mysterious "he" and the wolf of the title; and he made a number of comments on the literary construction of the book:

> The setting of the house seemed depressing, um, the smell of mould, the darkness.
>
> Um, let's see, there's the connection with, um, wolves and then wolf, and Cassy trying to recreate in her mind, um, the shape of the wolf and how it disappeared and slid into fragments, etc. I thought it was very good, it was an interesting image. I figure there was some connection with her using the, um, with the solid lump, the yellow lump of-- I thought there was some connection with the plot so far, because it's all very ambiguous and unclear about what's happening.

On the second reading, he was more explicit about his opinion of the way the book was written.

> The fact they mention Mick Phelan so soon was good. Um, I get annoyed by plot manipulation so I thought it was nice to have it at the beginning of the book.
>
> Um, I thought the contrast, or the, the clash, the clash of Cassy and Lyall was emphasized here, I thought it was, I thought it was good to make that clear right away.
>
> There's the description of, um, the peeling wallpaper and the sun rising, etc., and I thought it was a useless description because it had nothing to do with the plot really, and I understand, well, it's like, um, Ivan Denisovich, like the (inaudible) where they describe these horrible conditions, it has a lot to do with the theme and plot, but I don't see the connection here. Um, it gives, gives you a feeling of setting but too much time was spent on that.
>
> As far as the (inaudible) Moongazer shows, they're going to, to what spider ambushes its prey instead of spinning the web, the wolf spider, a reference to later on. I wasn't sure, I was sort of curious whether it was actually tied in. I, what moth do you find in granaries, and, um, I couldn't remember if the moth was also tied with the wolf but I, I thought it was another part of the list so I, I, um, decided that was part of the connection. There were a number of examples, um, these two supported, supported Robert's statement, statement that they're not isolated facts so, um, I thought they were kind of, it was a good plot set-up rather than plot manipulation so I was pleased to read it.
>
> Um, I, um sort of had a sense of dramatic irony with the end of the chapter,

> Cassy wanted to tell about the, the yellow, the yellow plastic--plasticine, she thought it was plasticine. I guess that's natural; after the rest of the book, almost any plot development will be seen as dramatic irony.

Ed clearly had some understanding of a fair bit of technical vocabulary. This was only one strand of his response to the book, however; he commented on his emotional reaction to the characters and also made many personal associations with scenes in the book. His two responses to the passage where Cassy goes into the mirror room give some idea of the mix. On the first reading, he said this:

> Um, um, um, the setting of the house seemed depressing, um, the smell of mould, the darkness. Then, when she walked into the room surrounded with mirrors, um, and dancing candles, it seemed confusing and I was wondering, um, what exactly was happening. Although it said that the room was large, I got the feeling that the room was actually very small. Um, it seemed, it seemed, it seemed to me, I, I connected with, with a room of my cousin's for some reason, in terms of the shape and size.

On the second reading, he was trying to set the room in the context of the book as a whole.

> Um, I didn't see the point of the room with the mirrors, that was, well, in terms of the story, I didn't understand how it tied in with any of the story, maybe perhaps thematically, or to set atmosphere with the dreams that she has, sort of abstract thoughts, but I did not, couldn't understand why it was there.

Ed's final response to the book was an interesting one. I asked him how he reacted to the book as a whole.

> *Ed*: To *Wolf*? Um, critically or--
>
> *Margaret*: Any way you like to tell me about it.
>
> *Ed*: Okay. Um, I thought it was a good book. I've, I've spent too much time in English, I'd be, I end up analyzing everything I read, deconstructing in a sense, talking, you know. I don't see the relevance here and I, I haven't done that so-- I thought the book was good. I didn't think it was, you know, wonderful. Um, I found that, um, really I connected with some characters, namely Lyall; um, I didn't connect with Cassy at all. I found her, you know, extremely annoying character, I wanted to hit her several times while I was reading. Um, Robert I sort of connected with, Goldie reminded me of some people I know; she didn't really remind me until near the end when she was getting really ditsy. Um, of course that was really a facade but-- Um, some parts I found quite, um, terrifying, I'm not sure why I could, you know, why they were so terrifying, I couldn't place the fear but I, um--
>
> *Margaret*: Would you say you enjoyed reading it?
>
> *Ed*: Yeah, I enjoyed reading it, it was, I found it a quick read and it was, I don't know, it was, it was a fun book to go through. I wouldn't want to study

> this for any great length of time but it was, it was a fun book.

In this response to the book, Ed does a number of things: he tries to separate himself from what he perceives as the over-analytical approach of his English classes and, perhaps as an antidote, he winds up describing his level of identification with the different characters, drawing comparisons with acquaintances of his own. He again mentions that parts of the book terrified him, but his analysis peters out just as his sentence does.

It is, of course, impossible to disentangle Ed's reading from his apparent ignorance of fairy tales, or at least of "Little Red Riding Hood," the crucial story for an informed reading of *Wolf*. There is no question that he picked up atmosphere very quickly and responded, usually with specific comparisons to relevant incidents in his own past. The allusions in the book did not exactly pass him by; he knew something was happening, just as he and many other readers knew that the aconites were fulfilling a role in the story even if they were extremely unclear about just what an aconite actually is. But he was unable to put a shape on the fairy tale references; they appear to have been evoked in a very shadowy way for him. In a way, this seems to have confined his reading more to the limits of his own past experiences and emotions, and it is perhaps not surprising that, in his final summary, this is what he chose to emphasize.

Keith--Grade 11

Keith's two sessions with me were by far the longest of all the student readers. He had a very chequered past and had just moved to Edmonton and started in this high school a few weeks before. In our first session, he talked about *Wolf* in enormous detail; in the second session, he had very little to say about the first four chapters but a great deal to say about the book as a whole and about his own life.

Keith's reading past was as variegated as his life experiences. He had lived with his mother for most of his life and she is a great reader ("It's her vice beyond anything else," he said.) As a young child, he owned a number of books. "But then there was a period of maybe, I'd say, seven or eight years that I probably didn't crack a book besides within a classroom."

As he grew older, he slid back into reading gradually, occasionally looking at a magazine rather than do an unwelcome chore.

> And that, that again develops into, all of a sudden you see something on the back of a novel or somebody recommends a novel to you and you go, Hey that sounds cool, and you pick it up therefore and, and it only carries on from that. Um, I find though, in the past, since this particular school semester has started, generally I find I read about three books a year, while in the past, say, month and nine days I have read three novels, so I'm well ahead of my yearly quota.

His favourite book is *Doomsday Conspiracy* by Sydney Sheldon. Although he says he never re-reads, this is one book that he says would be worth reading a second time. In general, his favourite reading material is mysteries and he likes his books to be recognizably realistic for the most part, contemporary and preferably with something to be learned about the real world. At the time of our interview he was reading a book about a corporate detective on Wall Street.

> Um, I, I must admit an element of mystery in it and of course I have a business mind so to hear about SEC scandals and, and, and Stock Exchange scandals and just, like, scandals in the business world, it's cool because it obviously, you know, it just kind of, the only thing you can do is expand your knowledge of, of, of the business world in a sense, you know. I like to try to learn what little there is to learn about books. I don't go searching for it but if it comes to me, wonderful, if it doesn't, well then, that book was just, you know, a timekeeper.

When we met, Keith was living with his aunt. He had left his mother at very short notice to go live with his father and stepmother whom he did not know at all well. He went from a large suburban house to a trailer. The relationship with his father and stepmother foundered and he moved again, to Edmonton to live with an aunt.

Keith commented many times on the parallels between Cassy's experience and his own. I asked him how this affected his reading of the story.

> *Margaret*: I think of all the readers . . . you seem to be the one in the personal situation closest to Cassy, in that you have recently left home and changed the circumstances that you live in. Did you find that that kept moving into the book, that you kept reflecting on the parallels between Cassy's situation and your own as you read? Or was it again something that only struck you when you weren't reading?
>
> *Keith*: (sighs) Oh, it was there every once in a while, you know, I'd kind of go, I was there.
>
> *Margaret*: Mmm.
>
> *Keith*: That happened to me. And okay, yeah, because, I mean, I don't expect it to end up in the same way.
>
> *Margaret*: Well, no, obviously the details are not going to be the same but it's some of the same emotional territory.
>
> *Keith*: Yeah, kind of like, you know, you're not, like she said, what with the yellow gunk, she wasn't looking for any reason to call Nan but it just kind of fell in her lap.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Keith*: I was never really looking at any reason to call my mother, um, not that we had any sore feelings, it was just expensive and neither my mother nor my father nor myself could afford it. But the reason fell into my lap, there were some things at home I needed and, um, some information and to get papers transferred and so forth. I mean, that's just one thing. There again, you know, Cassy left her comfortable happy home, you know, her room

> and everything, and was kind of basically shoved out the door. I mean, I left in a matter of hours too.

I emphasized to Keith that I was anxious not to pry into his private life and feelings, but that I was interested to know how he felt about reading something with so many parallels to his own recent experience.

> *Margaret*: Can I ask you a question? It's only going to be true for you, but, there are people who say that people in a disturbing situation, um, or, you know, something that just churns up their lives, um, would like to read books about other people in the same situation, and there's another school of thought that says they probably want to read about anything but. Did you find that your own background intruded on this book, did you feel, I don't want to read about this, I have enough trouble living with this stuff? Or were you intrigued by the parallels?

Keith's answer was interesting on many levels, not least because of the way he emphasized the fictional nature of the book.

> *Keith*: I didn't actually have either of those feelings.
>
> *Margaret*: Okay.
>
> *Keith*: Um, I read the story, I was very interested in the story, the parallels were interesting to find, like, the situations that felt close to home were, were kind of nice cause it almost made me to feel somebody else has lived through this, or at least has thought about it enough to write about it.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Keith*: Um, I never had the feeling, I don't want to read this cause it's too close to home.

Keith's reading

The way Keith's own experiences affected his reading of *Wolf*, causing him to notice details and emotional reverberations that escaped most other readers, was only one aspect of his approach which differentiated him from the rest. The single most striking fact about his transcripts lies in the enormous imbalance between his first reading and his second.

Although he clearly noticed the emotional impact of even very small details in the story, this element in his reading did not drive him faster through the story. On the contrary, of all the readers, including the 23 in the pilot study, he was the one who struck the balance most clearly in favour of accuracy over momentum. On his first reading he puzzled over every tiny detail in the story, working it out as clearly as he could before moving on. In the second reading, he could barely bring himself to talk about the chapters at all; he had nothing to say. "I know just about everything that's going on," he said after the first chapter, and, after the fourth, "To read it again, all the details that we found curious previously are now all solved."

The imbalance between the two readings was so striking that I was moved to count the lines of transcript. Excluding all my comments, Keith spoke for 589 lines on his first reading of the first four chapters and for 31 on his second reading.

To do justice to the massive detail of his first reading is clearly a challenge. Keith talked mostly in questions, querying reasons for word selection, raising issues of vocabulary and cultural background which puzzled him, observing emotional nuances of characters' words and behaviour, and wondering about plot issues. His reading was exhaustive. He regularly made comparisons with his own experience, both on a large scale (the emotional upheaval of his sudden move three months before) and on a small scale ("She eats porridge--I hate porridge. . . . Apparently Cassy doesn't like porridge either--that's cool.")

Like several other readers, Keith was struck by the word "padded" in the second sentence of Chapter 1 and made the link with the book's title. Cultural points such as a grandmother being called Nan and the head of a nursing ward being called a Sister clearly had no meaning for him and he struggled for quite a while with the relationship between Cassy, Nan, the Sister and Mrs. Ramage. He looked carefully for details which would establish Cassy's age, and wondered over and over again about the identity of Goldie. His reading of nuances was perceptive.

> [In] the majority of the past conversation with Nan and Cassy, Nan seems to be quite cold but, by the way Cassy seems to care about Nan, I don't think it is regular--that and by the fact that the author is making such notation of the fact that she said it coldly.

He also drew upon details of his own experience to refine the subtlety of his interpretation of the text.

> Um, why is Cassy so worried about coming back? I mean, it, it's, to me the fact that she left pyjamas in the wash would say that she's coming back but she seems to be worried and still--it's kind of like me, I mean, I've still got dirty laundry on the floor in my room in Vancouver, so-- (laughs, then sighs).

Keith did not forget details as he proceeded. In Chapter 1, he was very struck by the fact that Cassy took her own pen to Goldie's home. (He moved seamlessly from this small topic to the large one of a strange father in a way that was very typical of his work with this book.)

> Mmm, why can't she rely on Goldie to have a pen? Generally it's something everybody's got kicking around in the corner of a couch and so forth. Um, when she looks at the photograph, she, she tilts it to the light wondering for the thousandth time where he was now. Now earlier it said that it was her father, but my curiosity is, why does she not know where he is? That bringing back personal memory, generally I don't know where mine was, and to live with him for the first time in roughly sixteen years was quite amazing. It only lasted two months but it was quite amazing.

The large topic of parents recurred regularly in his discussion but so did the small topic of the pen. Later in Chapter 1 he commented,

> I have to assume from what the past few, um, mentions of Goldie, she's quite

> irresponsible to not even have a pen.

Later in Chapter 1, he raised the topic yet again.

> The more I, I go on, I notice that Goldie seems to be worse and worse of a person, not necessarily a person, I mean, she's got a good heart or something, but she doesn't seem to me to be someone anyone trusts for anything, including having a pen.

Keith noticed that Nan did not even give Cassy a chance to run through the directions for Goldie's house before pushing her out the door. He was quick to pick up the implications of Nan's attempt to make Cassy feel better.

> Now, *Things will work out.* Um, that makes notation to the fact that she's going to be there for quite a while and she may have to do some suffering before things get comfortable. Like, she's going to have to work to be comfortable.

Keith was perplexed even by a cultural reference as widely known as the Tube, and he puzzled and puzzled over the problem of what a squat could be. His lack of knowledge about London led to his wondering over many items which it seems hard to think Gillian Cross ever ascribed any importance to. For example:

> Now, why are all these places so, kind of like, dingy? She says that it, um, looked unreal as if the tall shabby houses were painted on cardboard. She plodded past them without taking, thinking about the boarded-up windows and, and gardens full of rubbish. I mean, it sounds like a really awful neighbourhood. Now they're all numbered, so am I, am I to assume that they're like condos or are there just really low-numbered, low-numbered houses? I don't know.

In his account of his reading, Keith made no attempt to filter or organize the large questions and the small ones. He raised every kind of issue as it occurred to him.

> Why does she say here that, that the, the writer is irregular with every letter painfully formed? Does that mean that her, or rather that Goldie even can't, can't write? . . . She had announced the fact that she was Goldie's daughter so that Goldie is her mother. I assumed that from the first but there was nothing to prove it. What's a bell-push? I'm assuming that it's a doorbell but it's just a different way of saying it. Again, I guess that has to do with the English, it's neat, because it's something I've never really heard. Somebody had nailed a piece of wood across the letterbox. Does that mean that they want the letterbox kept closed or just to be generally left alone?

The Moongazer van and the mirror room, added to the decrepit state of the house, made Keith wonder if there was some possibility of drugs being involved in the household.

Keith was in the minority of readers who identified the Red Riding Hood reference at the very first opportunity. He noticed Lyall's greeting to Cassy as Little Red Riding Hood and commented on what Cassy's reaction told us about her.

> Now Cassy is, automatically assumes that this person isn't a boyfriend because he's too old. Now this immediate greeting--he's not very formal but he sounds nice. I mean, he didn't say, What are you doing here, he said, Hello Little Red Riding Hood, but it was just the last thing that Cassy seemed to expect so she didn't know how to respond to, which strikes me as she's not used to people being any less than, earlier quoted, sensible--on the level, straight, or uptight.

When he read the first dream, he instantly made the connection.

> *Keith*: Now, it goes into here, that she's having a dream of being in a forest. Now, that's what I wanted to check when I looked back to the first chapter is whether she had no problems at all getting, having dreams, or had a great deal of problems having dreams and the first chapter said she had quite a bit of difficulty having dreams. So we see her having a dream here. It strikes curiosity. The fact that she's in a forest, as I would suppose she's in a forest, yeah, with no path, no obvious direction to any extent, and, basically it's here and there, she doesn't know where, but she's comfortable. She's got her basket on her arm--I would almost think this dream goes back to the fact that Lyall sat on the floor and said, Well, hello Red Riding Hood, and that somehow ties into this with her basket. I don't understand the word acon--
>
> *Margaret*: Aconites.
>
> *Keith*: Okay, what are they?
>
> *Margaret*: Flowers.
>
> *Keith*: Okay. Yeah. What other name do they have? According to this they have some other name she doesn't know and some meaning she needed to understand. But the word slid away like soap as she tried to grasp it and she could not remember. So she lost that whole thought and began to pick the flowers and that's where we leave off, so obviously this dream has a profound effect on, I would take it to the fact that she doesn't generally have dreams and that she knows that there's something she's trying to figure out, that it's rather than a dream, more like a premonition.

Keith made similar observations on the second dream.

> Um, again the dream, with the, the aconite all over the place. Again it's definitely a premonition that's leading up to having something to do with Moongazer but what, where's it going? . . . Now who is this in her dreams? Um, if I'm not mistaken, no, she, she doesn't make a, a connection with the fact that the voice is male, she does make a connection with the fact that it's husky. I would assume from that, I may be wrong, but I would assume from that it is male which makes me curious to know, is it maybe Robert or Lyall or even her father from that matter? Or is it a wolf, by the last sentence, *Shall I show you the path? We could play a little game.* Curious to me.

On his second reading, Keith mainly raised referential questions that the rest of the book had not supplied answers to. We sorted out the meaning of the Sister in the context of Nan's work as a nurse, and he continued to fret over the definition of a squat. (After he had finished reading the four chapters, before we proceeded to talk about the book as a whole, I explained the concept of squatting to him.)

In Chapter 2 he commented on a word choice.

> Um, the one and only time that I can recall at all, period, when, um, Robert ran down the stairs to let her in was the one and only time in the book that I can recall that the author didn't use "padded" to describe the sound the feet made.

His verdict on the complete book was favourable.

> It was a good book. I liked the way it travelled from a little girl and her Nan to her, um, IRA father, um, how the plasticine type object, all of a sudden it was more a threat of it being a plastic explosive. Um, I really liked Lyall's character because one minute he could be quite childish with Goldie and the other minute he could be a responsible adult. Um, it seemed to move quite, quite quickly, nothing was dwelled on too seriously, like, you know, four pages of description of one character (inaudible), you know, a character'd be lucky if they got more than a paragraph for a description which I like. I mean, I know I'm, I don't like to be left guessing but at the same time I don't like to know exactly what colour speckles they have in their eyes.

He took the dream sequences to be premonitions rather than dreams, saying that dreams are much more random fantasy than this set of recurring scenes. I asked him what sorts of things the dreams anticipated.

> *Keith*: Well, one was the flowers.
>
> *Margaret*: Mmm hmm.
>
> *Keith*: You know, you don't really know what, what meaning they have at all until it comes up with the topic of wolves, and wolves tends to lead to her father but she's not really aware of that. Um, it just seems to kind of give her short little details that somewhere along the, her next day, somebody will say something or do something and goes, Hang on, where'd I hear that before? Um, it's not that they let on any great detail until I suppose towards the end where she felt that Gran was in danger because she had put the whole story together. Um, I thought that was an interesting element.

When I asked him if the dreams reminded him of any other story, he did not hesitate.

> *Keith*: Oh, sure, Little Red Riding Hood.
>
> *Margaret*: Then how do you think that worked with, with the main story?
>
> *Keith*: I suppose it, hmm, to me, I mean, Little Red Riding Hood summed up in a matter of a few words, there's a little girl going on a long journey, um, has a few elements of surprise and, and fear, and, in turn, expecting or not, she gets to her destination to save her grandma, so I suppose that in the sense

> of the story it holds exactly the same meaning. Not to mention with the subtopic, um, the Moongazer doing the topic of wolves, so it all fits in sort of together in a million different ways. It could be described as kind of, like, linked. I suppose that's the general idea.
>
> *Margaret*: Did you notice those links as you were reading or do they occur to you now more substantially as you think about it?
>
> *Keith*: Um, they are some that, you know, occur as you are reading but for the most part you, you go after the book and go, Neat! And then you finish the last page, think about all the things that we have here wrote down or I've thought about, I'm going, I'm going, Why? Like, you know (inaudible) a lot of, you know, silly things, like, that people said that would normally be, um, inobtrusive ideals or, you know, just dialogue, nothing too serious, all of a sudden you noted, makes all that much more meaning. Like one thing that gave me notice, um, I think I did notice it originally [he did], but for the second time it held a lot different curiosity, like it made a lot more sense. I, it was curious to me the first time for utterly different reasons, um, when Cassy said, I was hungry, he goes, you know, it's not much but it'll keep a wolf, a wolf away to [*sic*] the door and he, he, um, changed his tone different than she would have it expected and it, I didn't think much of it before except for the connotation of wolves, therefore leading to the title, big deal! Whereas now, you know, it's like, why is he putting the accent on wolves, it doesn't have anything to do with the title, you know, it does but it doesn't.

Keith enjoyed the book but like some of the other readers, he wanted to make some small changes to the ending.

> Well, this, this is, to me, a story. It doesn't offer any way of thinking or financial goal. (laughs) Well, it, it's a good story, I will put that forward without hesitation, and I enjoyed reading it. In fact, the day I took it home, I left myself with a chapter before I went to bed, to read the following day, and only because I was being forced to go to sleep, otherwise I would have read it. Um, not by the fact that my eyes were closing, but by the fact that my aunt was going, Go to bed! The light was bothering her. But I really enjoyed it, and when I finished the last chapter I went, Ohhh neat! One of the things that did kind of bother me, thought, about the story was that, um, Cassy returned with her grandmother. I, in my, I don't know exactly why Cassy was with Nan but in my opinion, now that, that Goldie seems to be getting on and, and has a better way of going about things and is actually making it somewhere, I believe that, you know, now would be as good a time as any to, to live with her mother. To me, that sounds fair, I mean that's what I would comprehend the whole thing. That's because I live with it, right? . . . I mean, I left my mom and it was time to live with my dad. Therefore, but--I don't know. Maybe it's not the greatest situation for her even still, but at the same time, I think it would give her some experience that, in my opinion, is absolutely invaluable. Especially with the attitude she went there with, the one that she in turn left with was ever so, not, not amazingly different but she wasn't as harsh to everything and related everything back to something that Nan has said at one point in time or another, she seems to be thinking for herself. . . . It seems that, when I think about it through the book, she's done

> quite a fair bit of growing up and, and mental growing.

It seems fairly clear that very few details of the story missed Keith in his exhaustive reading. His memory for small textual points was very good and his ability to make connections and patterns was also well developed. The role of his own experiences in his reading was very clear, but his reading was not in any way confined to a transfer of his own emotions to the heroine. He was emotionally engaged but also intellectually engaged, and his final comment as he left at the end of the second session was, "If you ever, like, come back through, make sure you look me up because I'd be more than happy to do it all over again."

Affective engagement with content

Candace, Ed and Keith are very different readers in many ways, but I have grouped them together because of the common factor of the way they made an affective link with some aspects of the *contents* of the book. Candace identified with Cassy, Ed disliked her, and Keith made a connection with Cassy's situation, rather than her personality.

The first four readers also made such linkages, though perhaps not so strongly expressed, and it is possible to argue that it might be difficult to get through an entire novel without making some form of affective engagement with the contents, with the people in the story and what happens to them. Reading in a state of total indifference to every aspect of the plot is certainly possible, but, in most cases, I suspect it leads to the kind of perfunctory experience hinted at by the undergraduate who skipped all the dream sections of *Wolf*. It can be done, but, as an intrinsic experience, there is little point to it; the reason for doing so must be externally provided.

These three readers all commented on aspects of the construction of the book and they were certainly not indifferent to the fact that their awareness of Cassy and her predicament was shaped by the way in which Gillian Cross chose to present it (although we may wonder if any of them would have articulated this idea outside the format of the interview). But their first interest was not in the way the text was formed; it was in the characters and the plot.

We pay lip-service to the importance of engagement, but I am not sure that we have worked out the implications for the temporal activity of reading. Does engagement affect the "good-enough" balance between the need for accuracy and the need for momentum? Does this balance alter between the first reading and the subsequent ones? Does it vary from reader to reader?

Certainly, engagement needs to be taken into account; but its consequences may work in several ways. Just as forgetting is an aspect of reading which is often neglected, so is impatience, an affective, but also cognitive, consequence of one kind of emotional involvement. You can be impatient to get to the end to find out if everything works out all right for Cassy. You can be impatient with literary detours which interfere with the pell-mell development of the plot (possibly the kindest interpretation of the dream-skipping strategy). In the case of Candace and Keith, both mentioned that a number of ideas fell into place only as they reached the end of the book; in such a condition, much of your experience of the book may rely on your ability first to notice and second to remember details that make little sense at the time. Impatience can certainly interfere with such a process.

On the other hand, engagement may increase your patience, your sense of leisurely enjoyment, and your intellectual involvement as well. If your involvement in the book is "heated" by some kind of connection with the characters and events of the book, you may feel an increased capacity to dwell in the world of the book, to take your time and not rush to the finish, to notice and enjoy details as they accumulate.

Those readers who dislike re-reading stories are especially challenged to sort out responses to the text which may be paradoxical, even contradictory. The readers who know they will return to a book they have enjoyed do have the option of applying their strategies differentially on separate occasions: high speed reading to find out the ending on the first contact, slow and careful lingering on re-reading, for example, or vice versa, or any other of flexible alternatives. Those who know they will not return to the text must make a single reading fulfil different emotional desires.

The role of affect in reading is a complicated one. In the case of these three readers and the kind of emotional connection they represent, they are making a particular kind of commitment to a virtual situation, a fictional set of events, a pretend person. Yet it is clear with all three of them that the make-believe world of *Wolf* has put out tentacles (maybe "feelers" is a more evocative word in this context) which connect with real moments in their own lives. These historical experiences are called to mind by the prompt of an account of something which has never really happened.

I have already laid great emphasis on the importance of affect in my preliminary account of how we read. I want to return to the issue again, however, because all the transcripts emphasize over and over again that the affective power of what we read is simply enormous. Affectively engaged reading need not merely involve a simple commitment to the storyline and characters; in the next section we will explore some more complex aspects of the affective relationship with the text. However, even the simplest form of textual engagement requires our attention, probably more so in the reading of fiction than in any other kind of reading. My affective engagement with a recipe or a set of instructions may be substantial but it can be explained by a form of relatively simple utilitarianism. Why should I bother to commit my imagination to something I always already know never has happened and never will happen?

Medway and Stibbs (1990) have pointed out that we do not feel the same pity for a dying character in a book as we do for someone who is really dying. This is probably true, though such detachment may be something that grows on us as we mature; I certainly recall feeling sensations of tremendous shock and grief over the death of such fictional characters as Matthew Cuthbert and Beth March. Nevertheless, whether the emotions we encounter are virtual in themselves, or even simply virtually derived, we measure such emotions by the gauge of real experiences. Over and over again in these transcripts, we can see readers making use of their own histories to work out the affective measure of what was happening to Cassy. Candace recalled the endless road to her grandparents' cottage (ironically, a road presenting the more genuinely lethal threat of bears who actually do attack humans); Ed turned back to the moment when his puppy attacked him and described his own lingering terror of the dark; Keith talked about the significance of the pyjamas left in the wash and the seizure of an excuse for a phone call back to the old home. The connection to the event and emotion in the book, in every case, is an affective link. The readers used the emotions associated with an experience of their own to help them feel for themselves something of what the imaginary character, Cassy, might be feeling.

David Gelernter, in his account of the role of creative thinking in the development of artificial intelligence, pays a great deal of attention to the importance of this kind of association which he calls affect linking. (1994, 6) It is worth exploring some of his ideas to see what light they may shed on the reading process.

Low focus thinking

Gelernter presents a description of the mind at work which seems to lie somewhere between a theory and an extended metaphor. Human thought, he suggests, works on a continuum: "Every human mind is a spectrum; every human mind possesses a broad continuous range of different ways in which to think." (1994, 4)

Gelernter uses the term "mental focus" to describe a person's place on this spectrum at any given point.

> Mental focus might sound like another way of saying "degree of alertness"; what's new is the way *cognition as a whole* changes in response to changing focus. High focus puts the thinker at the high end of the cognitive spectrum and certain consequences follow. At the high end, thought is analytic and penetrating. It deals in abstractions. (1994, 4)

A person thinking at high focus is concentrating on methodical connections between facts, extracting the common factors for rational and useful grouping. At a lower focus, thought is less analytical and more concrete.

> As we set off down-spectrum, thinking becomes less penetrating and more diffuse, consciousness gradually "spreads out" and . . . emotion starts gradually to replace logical problem-solving as the glue of thought. (1994, 5)

At the lower end of the spectrum, something resembling free association becomes more important. It is at this stage that metaphors and creative connections are engendered. The lowest stage of mental focus involves dreams and hallucinations, where linkages are almost completely emotional.

The kind of mental leap which makes a person associate two memories which appear to have nothing in common, Gelernter claims, is "paradigmatic of the most significant unsolved problem of cognition." (1994, 6) He goes on,

> *Affect linking*, I will claim, is responsible for bringing these leaps about. They are not random (nor need they have anything to do with repressed Freudian angst); they come about exactly when *two recollections engender the same emotion*, and they only happen towards the low-focus end of the spectrum.

> Towards the lower end of the spectrum, affect linking causes creativity, metaphor, and in some cases spiritual mind-states to emerge. Other cognitive events accompany affect linking: thought grows ever more concrete. Recollection grows broader, more tangible and full of ambience and all-inclusive until eventually, a recollection becomes indistinguishable from a hallucination; and other things being equal, the illogic of dreaming waits at the bottom." (1994, 6 - 7)

Gelernter suggests that some activities which are performed with relative automaticity, such as driving or shaving, use up a certain amount of mental attention. With part of the mind distracted, the rest of the mind is freed to roam creatively, establishing new analogies and unexpected connections. Gelernter suggests that this phenomenon is a consequence of low-focus thinking.

I do not want to go into great detail about Gelernter's propositions which he has attempted to apply to a particular form of artificial intelligence. What I do want to raise is the question of how far such a description can help us to understand what happens when we read.

At high focus, Gelernter argues, we want answers to our questions and our problems. We search our memories for the *relevant* ingredient which certain incidents have in common; we are looking for solutions and explanations. We take a stack of memories and examine one aspect of all of them. At low focus, we are much more apt to recall broadly and inclusively--rather than combining and comparing one aspect of many memories, we draw up many aspects of one memory. Our thinking becomes more diffuse but also more concrete, less abstract. It may be useful to make a comparison with Rosenblatt's distinction between efferent (clearly high-focus) and aesthetic (low-focus) reading.

In low-focus thinking, we recall the emotional ambience which surrounds a particular memory and, according to Gelernter's argument, our mind can make a leap to a different memory which is swathed in the same emotion. Emotions, he says, are subtle, complicated and idiosyncratic, but they create real links between experiences with nothing else in common.

> [F]or affect linking to happen, remembered feeling must be *felt*, not just dispassionately examined. . . . For the affect link to work, the thinker must "re-experience," *feel* his memories. (1994, 28)

There is considerable potential in this chaining by emotion for thoughts to run free, out of control. "[Y]ou cannot choose your emotions. Emotions choose themselves." (1994, 29) This phenomenon is a familiar one, for example, as we drift into sleep, at a very low focus indeed in Gelernter's metaphor.

Gelernter goes on to suggest,

> The role of emotion in thought, then, is exactly to glue low-focus thought-streams together. At low focus, one thought is connected to the next by an emotion the two of them share, as one coach is coupled to the next by steel latches. There are no trains without couplers. There is no low-focus thought without emotion. (1994, 29)

I want to consider one last quote from Gelernter's outline before looking at how this idea may give us a way of talking about the role of affect in reading. Gelernter says,

> And why, then, might a thing like shaving or driving induce you to lose control over your own thought-stream? Why might it cause a state of mind in which a person is "taken out of himself?" Because as focus widens, you come to feel your thoughts. The feelings you re-experience aren't things you chose, nor did you choose to recollect them. More important, those recollected feelings may hurtle you suddenly to a far-off corner of the cognitive universe, by connecting you to other recollections of the same emotional color; and that dizzy flight through cognitive spacetime is wholly outside your control. It happens because of the "laws of the mind," because of the way affect linking and recollection work, and because of certain emotional responses in your own past. (1994, 30)

It is not uncommon to find comparisons between the act of learning to read and the act of learning to drive a car or ride a bicycle. All three involve developing some kind of automatized way of finding the balance between the need for momentum and the obligation for care. Is it possible that the automatic processes of word recognition require the same kind of attention as driving, freeing the mind for a lower-focus form of affective association? In the case of fiction reading, where the author has supplied exactly the kind of concrete and affectively charged details which accompany low-focus thinking, is there a kind of synergy at work between the process of reading and the imagination of the fictional world? The potential power of such a description is very exciting but it is something that is difficult to pin down; by its very nature it is nebulous.

Yet, in the transcripts of the readings of *Wolf*, there is certainly very clear evidence of affective association. Candace recollecting the path to her grandparents' cabin, Ed thinking about the bulldozer backing up towards his car, Keith remembering the dirty clothes on the bedroom floor, were clearly making a link with points of the text, supplying the affective shape and force of the fictional moment from a remembered real moment in their own lives.

To what extent such a process is largely tacit in unmarked silent reading is an open question. Candace, Ed and Keith made their memories explicit because they were *talking* about their reading. I am not sure that in private reading it is actually necessary to reconstitute the actual detail which supplies you with what feels like an appropriate emotional nuance. It is quite possible that all the reader thinks at the time of reading is some version of, "I know what this feels like; I know the emotional shape of this experience." It may indeed be that we develop a form of affective schema along with our content schemata.

It is possible that Gelernter's metaphor gives us a way of exploring at least some part of the appeal of fiction reading. The reading of fiction is not the same as untrammelled free association. The emotional coupling of the fictional moment with the experienced moment is not the same thing as a freely wandering mind. The pleasure of reading a story may lie, at least in part, in the way the author and the story make use of and *direct* emotional associations, cause us to recognize that our subtle and idiosyncratic sensations have counterparts.

In the transcripts there are certainly clear moments when readers made connections between Cassy's sensations as described by Gillian Cross and their own at particular times in their lives. It is impossible to evoke the interiority of such moments by way of these transcripts, however; and I want to look at a reading experience of my own because I am in a position to explain the experience from the inside.

When I read the book, *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1991), I followed with great interest the activities and thoughts of Esperanza, the child heroine who lives in conditions of poverty and discrimination in a Chicago slum. She describes a difficult life, one far harder than anything I ever experienced as a girl. Nevertheless, I found I could supply enough emotional resonance from my own childhood to enable me to make some sense of two experiences at once, one fictional, one remembered. I grew up on a street with very mixed housing and knew some children who, by my sheltered standards, were rough indeed. Esperanza never actually provides a specific description of the sensation of knowing a place intimately, loving it unquestioningly, yet finding it, in many ways, hostile and frightening. I had not even known that my sensations about Pennywell Road in St. John's, Newfoundland, could be specified so precisely or so delicately. *The House on Mango Street*, describing a slum neighbourhood in Chicago and an urban Hispanic child, made my Newfoundland childhood vivid to me again, in ways that were simultaneously painful and exhilarating.

It seems evident to me that what I am describing is a case of affect linking and that Gelernter is right when he says that emotions do not have to be simple; they can be subtle, idiosyncratic, nuanced, complicated. "*They have no names.*" (1994, 28, emphasis in original)

To the extent that, when I think about *The House on Mango Street*, I really think about the child on Pennywell Road, I suppose I am doing what Norman Holland describes when he talks about a reader's identity entering the feedback loop. (1988, 146) However, what happened as I read was more complicated. If I stopped reading, my mind did wander to details of street life in my childhood that I had completely forgotten about; but, *while I was reading*, the emotional shape of Pennywell Road simply *served* the reading of the book. I was reading about Mango Street and my own images simply furnished emotional colour and tone.

While I was reading, such evocation of images had to be achieved under the usual temporal pressure of finding a balance between momentum and accuracy. I could--and did--read more slowly than usual, but in the end, to be reading at all, I had to keep going. The emotional associations moved into some kind of shadowy life, served their purpose, and subsided (though they didn't disappear), to be replaced by new images. I knew as I was reading that my experience was powerful, but I didn't pause to explore why. And now, in retrospect, I am sure that the goodness of fit between what Cisneros described and what I could supply was only one part of my great pleasure in that book.

The fact that I finished the book feeling that my emotional vivification of the story had been very precise and delicate is a tribute to the fact that I could produce an affective schema that seemed to me to match what Cisneros was evoking. Obviously, no one can make a judgement on whether I was right or wrong about that. As far as I was concerned, at an emotional level my reading was successful. This is not the complete story of my reading of that book but it is the most private layer.

To return to the engagement of the three readers with *Wolf*, it may be that they felt at least something of this sensation of success in their reading. How delicately nuanced their responses were is impossible to gauge from the outside, and there is really no point in trying; there is no benchmark of success and failure on such issues in any case. Furthermore, to describe whether they were able to make affective connections with aspects of the story is not to account for the complete description of how they read the book. I suspect, nevertheless, that it begins, however tentatively and clumsily, to account for some of the power at the heart of reading fiction.

Culturally layered affect

The contribution of affective implication to fiction reading is highly important but my description so far has concentrated on the simplest layer of that operation: the evocation of personal memories and affective schemata. These affective matchings, when they work, can provide the fictional situation with a kind of echo chamber of real emotional experience supplied by the reader. Jeanette Winterson supplies a variant of this metaphor in her description of the "rooms behind."

> Art communicates, that is certain. What it communicates, if it's genuine, is something ineffable. Something about ourselves, about the human condition, that is not summed up by the oil painting, or the piece of music, or the poem, but, rather, moves through it. What you say, what you paint, what you can hear is the means not the end of art; there are so many rooms behind. (1992, 248)

A culture that provided only a corroboration of experiences you had already had, however, would be a very simple culture indeed. There may very well be novels that do little more than confirm their readers' own emotional experiences, but *Wolf* is not one of them, and the readers' responses to *Wolf* make it clear that they register this fact.

One of the major elements in the construction of *Wolf* is Cross's use of intertextuality, which she employs in many different forms. Most of the readers commented on this aspect of the book in one way or another. Some were more sensitive than others to the affective baggage carried by cultural references such as "Little Red Riding Hood." I want to look briefly at the case of Ed, because a gap in his background gives us perhaps the clearest view of what a second-layer image, as it were, can contribute to a reading of a book.

Ed supplied a very large number of personal memories as part of his reading of the book. When Cassy awoke from the first dream, at the start of Chapter 3, he was reminded of a survival camp he had once attended; he even expected Cassy to have the same problems and reactions as he had had.

> Um, with her waking up from the dream in the forest, it actually reminded me of a survival camp I had gone on once. I, I expected her to get up and find herself cold. I was surprised by the fact that she was hungry rather than

cold.

Later dreams reminded him of specific personal experiences. As he looked through the dreams, he mentioned his dog, his experience of getting lost while orienteering at the age of about eight, his nightmares, the occasion when he saw a bridge a long way away and it never seemed to come any closer, his fear of the dark, the cartoon wolf, the time when his puppy bit him, and the time when he was stuck in the car with the bulldozer approaching.

On one occasion, he did comment that he was being reminded of something else. "Um, but, um, this panicky, um, it does remind me of something else but I can't place it." And his comments on the cartoon wolf with the sheet pulled up do give some indication that he knew a fuller interpretation than his might be possible.

What did Ed miss by not having a mental version of "Little Red Riding Hood" available as he read the book? It seems very clear that all he could work out for himself was that there was a reference to a fairy tale involved.

Perhaps the clearest way of trying to answer that question is to return to the metaphor of the echo chamber. Ed made substantial use of his own experiences to bring life to the story as he read it. But the story of Little Red Riding Hood comes with a variety of implications and echoes added and subtracted over centuries. The story is simple but its hinterland involves generations of evocation, enhancement, bowdlerization, speculation. If Ed's recollections of his childhood fears and terrors added a "room behind" to his reading, he seems to have missed the catacombs "behind" the Red Riding Hood story.

Jack Zipes has produced a volume of versions of *Little Red Riding Hood*, and in his introduction he supplies a variety of analyses of what different versions may be communicating. At different times in history, and in different versions of the story, he suggests, Little Red Riding Hood has variously represented a warning to children, especially girls, not to be disobedient and careless (1983, 1); a celebration of a peasant girl's self-reliance (1983, 8); the danger of a little girl being "spoiled" by a wolf or a man (1983, 9); the contrasts and conflicts between the freedom of the wood and the constraints of the path (1983, 17); the quest for female independence and sexuality (1983, 39). Some versions were re-worked to eliminate any idea of Red Riding Hood being swallowed or touched (1983, 19 - 20); some were written as parodies and played textual games with the conventional and the expected (1983, 39).

I could go on citing examples for much longer. Zipes' introduction is 58 pages long and his book includes 31 different versions of the story (not including *Wolf* itself!). Clearly, none of the readers in this project had any idea of this complex, contradictory and ever-shifting history of a single tale. Nevertheless, most of them manifested some awareness of the reverberations available when the book moved from the evocation of first-hand emotional experience to the use of an *already-established* image, a culturally *used* icon.

I am trying to avoid the use of the word archetype at this point, because there is an implication of structural coherence and essentialism involved in that word. Such rigidity contradicts the way Red Riding Hood's fortunes have fluctuated over the years, and, in any case, holds out the danger of being reductive of the plurality which, after many centuries of re-tellings, is now inherent in her image. My personal view is that *Wolf* is the richer for being able to make use of the many contradictions in how Red Riding Hood is perceived; the story provides Cross with an opportunity to include levels of paradox that would be impossible to incorporate in the book without this kind of already-developed evocativeness. It is not necessary to be familiar with Red Riding Hood's complicated history in order to see the potential for the imagery of the book to be deepened with the reference; witness Brenda, not a very sophisticated reader, suddenly making the connection:

> Ohh, Little Red Riding Hood! . . . They all go together now. Okay, I see. . . . Yeah, it's like, it's like, it's like a different version of the Big Bad Wolf but she's in it and I think it's her father who's the big bad wolf.

The contrast between a personal evocation and the more complex association which is made possible when a reader recognizes the use of a culturally available token, image, reference, comes across very clearly in the reading of Susan, a participant in the pilot study. The pilot study students used a variety of ways of reporting on their responses. Susan spoke into a tape recorder as she read and I later made a transcript of that tape. Here she is reading the first dream for the first time, drawing on personal memory and her synthesis of what she had read so far:

> Again, it's all speculation, I think it always is in a first reading, the sweet smell of pine trees, the mention of the forest, the lower branches barring her way and the higher ones shutting out the light--sounds a lot like the dark forest of Goldie's room, the trees that are outside of the house, and the way out of the forest is like a shout, I'm not familiar with that word, rocous, raucous, whatever, and shocking. Okay. The flowers were sharp as a challenge, that obviously means something, and, well, she goes on to tell us that's some meaning that she needed to understand. She begins to pick the flowers. That's obviously very significant.

Susan was an after-degree education student with a B.A. in English, but it took more than the metonymy of the basket in the first dream to enable her to register the main image of the dreams. By the second dream, however, she has made this connection.

> And on 34, significantly, from moulding the wolf and wondering what it was exactly she was trying to create, she falls into dreaming. Okay, the dreams have a strong image of Red Riding Hood, very, very strong image of being threatened. The image, the threatening memory, that meant that Robert's mention, Robert's previous mention of the flowers brought up to her is because they're keeping her from Grandma's house. Ooh! This is getting very interesting and I'm very excited to find out what's going on. Yeah. This is really interesting. There's a lot of pieces that the reader can put together with just this little bit of text and, of course, you know, hindsight, something, I think, the reader has to determine what the wolf is. Is it a good wolf or a bad wolf? Is it right or wrong for Cassy to want to go to Grandma's house? Is there growth involved in listening to the voice? In the traditional sense of the fairy tale or whatever, fable, it's completely negative but, like, I say, it will be interesting to find out.

The Red Riding Hood image is already constructed in her head; in this passage, we can see Susan making new use of it.

Like Daniel, Susan has a history of formally articulating her responses to literature and it shows in the way she is able to consider many implications of the insertion of a culturally ambiguous second layer in the first level plot of Cassy's activities. I would argue that, at a simpler level, Brenda is doing much the same thing, and that, in his frustration over the inappropriately amusing image of the wolf in bed, Ed is registering that the text offers him a potential which he can't exploit.

Allusion works in many ways. In *Wolf*, the workings of allusion are part of the surface of the text and in the next section we will look more closely at readers who made that aspect of their reading more explicit. What I want to point out here is the role of allusion, of the use of cultural images already loaded with generations of meaning and evocation, in enlarging the emotional reference field of the story. This role of intertextual connotation is made plain enough in *Wolf* that Ed was able to see the absence of a sufficiently flexible reference in his own repertoire.

As links with other stories, poems, songs, paintings, and various works of art may add complexity to a text, so they can also provide one way of reducing emotional solipsism. If the only echo chamber available to you in your affective reading of a story consists of reverberations of your own voice, your experience will be seriously reduced and your ability to perceive new nuances and subtleties will be undermined. The kind of intertextuality which Cross makes use of allows readers to take in the idea that other people before them have pondered some of these issues and have arrived at different, even contradictory conclusions. This is hardly a startling idea to a sophisticated reader, but there are many readers to whom it is a new suggestion, and all readers can register the virtues inherent in the rejection of over-simplification.

Wolf is a book rich in its own intertextual references, but readers supplied their own linkages as well, and were thus able to invest this text with some of the emotional complexities and subtleties attached to another book. Christine, for example, was reminded of *The Secret Garden*, with its heroine suddenly adrift in the world. Hami found that the dream sections set in the forest reminded him of *The Bridge to Terebithia* and he was able to compare and contrast quite explicitly:

> Like, they're wandering in the forest and, you know, it's kind of the same thing, you know, except this one's kind of, they're, they're running so fast and everything, but the other one they were just calm and they were walking.

Such intertextual connections are relatively straightforward and clear-cut; but often the link can be obscure, even to the reader. Ed provided a fairly impenetrable example when he talked about Nan's strange behaviour over the phone call.

> I was, um, it was (inaudible) disturbing that she said I can't bother and couldn't get hold of Mrs. Ramage, it sort of reminded me of Macbeth not being able to say amen after he killed King Duncan.

It would be easy to dismiss this comparison as pretentious and therefore empty, but I think we would be mistaken to do so. Affect links can be highly subtle, even nameless as Gelernter has pointed out. It may be that what Ed is connecting is a sense of unease in his own mind as he read two very different texts. The only connection ever made between these two passages may lie in Ed's own response. This possibility does not invalidate Ed's linkage--for Ed.

Affect and cognition

I have chosen to explore the affective side of these three readings, but, of course, the readers were engaged in much more than emotional recognition as they read the text. I want to investigate a single example of orchestration at work in the reading process, and I have chosen to look at a passage read by Keith. He provides a useful case because he articulated his response so thoroughly on the first reading and because he was so meticulous in his wish to understand what was going on before he went any further. Not all readers would process text in the same way, but he does provide an interesting example of how many cognitive and affective issues can jostle in the brain at once.

On page 18, Cassy has arrived at the squat and given the groceries to Robert. The passage leads on into the first dream as follows:

> Robert took the bag and peered inside, spreading the handles wide. Cassy had a momentary glimpse of carrots and baked beans and tinned ham. And, at the very bottom, something smooth and yellow that she couldn't identify. (Bananas? But Nan wouldn't have put those under the tins.)
>
> "Brilliant," said Robert. He grinned and slung the bag over his arm. "Anything else you want now?"
>
> When Cassy shook her head, he padded off down the hall, towards the kitchen. Wearily she slid her feet out of her shoes and opened her suitcase to find the things she needed straightaway. Sponge bag. Pyjamas. Towel.
>
> The photograph on top slid sideways and she caught it just before it hit the floor. It had better go on the mantelpiece at once, out of harm's way. She stood up and put it right in the middle, so that the solemn, boy's face stared down towards her makeshift bed. But not quite at it. However Cassy shifted the picture, she had never been able to make those eyes look at her.
>
> They were still gazing across and beyond her as she settled under the blankets, wriggling to get herself comfortable on the hard floor. And when she closed her eyes, the solemn face jumbled with the rest of the day, making strange pictures as she sank into sleep.
>
> * * *
>
> . . . the sweet smell of pine trees was all round her and the ground under feet was soft with needles. Layer upon layer upon layer. (18)

This was Keith's comment on this section.

> What's the yellow thing at the bottom of the bag? Again, the "padded" on the feet, that just strikes me as curious, and likely he's doing a cat-like thing but the way he uses "padded" is kind of different. I guess that would mean he doesn't have socks or shoes of any sort on. What's a sponge bag? She obviously has a lot of care for that picture. What's the necessity of getting the boy's face to have the eyes focus on something directly? Now, it goes into

here, that she's having a dream of being in a forest.

When I looked at this set of remarks, I was reminded of Roland Barthes' codes for the analysis of a "readerly" text in *S/Z* (1974). There are five codes. The hermeneutic code involves enigmas and solutions; the semic code refers to the connotations of signifiers; the symbolic code involves multivalence and reversibility of relationships between words and possible meanings; the proairetic code deals with actions and consequences; and the cultural codes are references to bodies of knowledge.

Barthes works out a very complex analysis of the text of *Sarassine* using these codes; my application of them here to Keith's reading will be very approximate in comparison. Nevertheless, I think the parallels are suggestive.

The question about the yellow lump can be described as a hermeneutic question, in Barthes' terminology, involving enigma and solution. Keith goes on at once to look at possible connotations of the word "padded," a semic interrogation of the signifier. His question about the sponge bag is a simple referential question (and one which would not trouble a British reader for a second), and he follows it up at once with a symbolic question about the importance of the picture. It is possible to describe his last remark, on the dream, as a proairetic question about actions and consequences.

This kind of analysis is probably not very productive on any large scale, but it does give some hint of the kinds of intellectual operations which must be organized to make reading successful. Although I have laid particular emphasis in this section on the role and importance of affect, I do not mean to underplay the importance of the cognitive activities which are also an essential part of the reading process. Furthermore, such cognitive activities may involve their own affective consequences: curiosity, suspense, excitement, indifference.

The handling of the text brings with it its own kind of intrinsic satisfaction which is different from involvement in the content of the story but which certainly affects how the reading proceeds. Noticing patterns, making connections, predicting and reflecting are also part of reading. All the readers commented to a greater or lesser degree on this aspect of reading. However, the next students will shed particular light on the way in which readers can become engaged with features of the text as well as with aspects of the content.

Chapter 7

"I ALWAYS LOOK FOR SETTING": INTELLECTUALLY ENGAGED READING

To some readers, the idea of an affective engagement with the content of the book, with the characters and the events which happened, seemed to take second place to a more analytical encounter with the text. This kind of approach, on occasion, seemed to represent a different kind of engagement, though there were also times when it appeared to be very detached. The idea that you have to be caught up in the lives of the characters to engage with a story is a simplification, however, as the transcripts for these two Grade 11 readers demonstrate.

Debbie--Grade 11

Debbie reads a great deal, mostly non-fiction: biographies, autobiographies, some philosophy, especially the work of Frederick Nietzsche. She also reads short stories and poetry. Up to Grade 10, she was more of a fiction reader, particularly enjoying such books as the Jean Auel series which begins with *The Clan of the Cave Bear*. At the time of our interview she was reading two books, stories by Edgar Allen Poe and *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which she had read before some years earlier. From the examples she gave (*People of the Wolf* by Michael Gear, *The Lives of John Lennon* by Albert Goldman), her non-fiction reading included the more popular end of the market.

Debbie spoke more than once of her desire to increase and enhance her knowledge. She does not consider that her reading tastes have a great deal to do with what she learns in school, although she did give school credit for introducing her to Shakespeare ("*Macbeth*, that's one of my favourites").

> Shakespeare, I discovered last year, was a very fine writer, a very fine writer. School, for certain books, school does have an impact, it does, um, but for the, for the things that I'm into right now it doesn't really have much impact.

Debbie finds titles in a number of ways. She takes suggestions from her sisters and when she finds an author she likes, she reads through the complete works. She also keeps an eye out for what other people read:

> *Debbie*: But it's not people I know, it's people that I admire and then you see what they, they read and you say, well, you know, maybe I can get into this stuff.
>
> *Margaret*: How do you find out what other people read?
>
> *Debbie*: Um, well, if it's people I admire, not really heroes but just people I admire, I, you read their biographies and then read what they read.
>
> *Margaret*: How did you get into Nietzsche, for example?
>
> *Debbie*: Um, well, I'm a, I'm a very, very avid listener of The Doors (laughs)

> and Jim Morrison is very much into Nietzsche and I said, Well, who is this Nietzsche guy and I read it, I delved into it very quickly.
>
> *Margaret*: Was it what you expected?
>
> *Debbie*: Um, mmm hmm, yes, it was what I expected.
>
> *Margaret*: What is it about it that you find so interesting? Can you put it in a sentence or two?
>
> *Debbie*: Well, just, just seeing other people's outlook on life and what, what everything around you is. I like to look at, at different people's reaction to everyday life, to the, to people's lifestyles. Just difference in opinion.

The reading history which Debbie described was highly conventional up to high school. She learned to read without any problem, but could remember little about the process.

> Elementary, Grades 2 and 3, I read mostly the books that they did at school, the readers. I read Dick and Jane, people like that. As we got on, I read, I read sort of teenage books, sort of ridiculous books like *Sweet Valley High.* Um, and, yeah, I read a lot of that in Grades 6 and 7. Moving on, I read a lot of Jean Auel as I said, um, more of the, the books that can sort of be based on, on reality, sort of.

The Clan of the Cave Bear and its sequels led her to titles such as *People of the Wolf*, and somewhere around this point she began to read more poetry (she mentioned Margaret Atwood in particular) and short stories.

At the time of our interview, she said she read every night on the way to bed, sometimes for a long time.

Debbie's reading

Debbie's comments largely succeeded in interposing the text between the reader and the characters. She did not engage herself directly in the situation but instead commented regularly on aspects of the writing about the situation. Her opening remarks provide a good example of how she approached the book.

> Um, the first thing I noticed was setting. I always look for setting when I'm reading a book and I noticed it's somewhere, the first thing I noticed was somewhere in Britain, somewhere in England or somewhere, um, it seems to me like a low-class sort of slum area from, um, from the, the description of their home and their clothing. Um, I also noticed that they make an emphasis, a point of emphasizing that Cassy is sensible, they're constantly saying that she's sensible. Um, and I also noticed that Cassy has this great reluctance to go to Goldie's home and I know that it's, it's not, um, how can I say it, it's not, it's not a ridiculous sort of, um, reluctance, because they make a point that Cassy is very sensible.

Debbie was very ready to say that she could not reach conclusions too early in her reading, although she was prepared to hypothesize.

> This man who came in first, I wasn't sure at all. At first I thought it was some sort of--hmm, this is kind of ridiculous but some sort of sexual rendezvous, but then I went on and I thought that maybe it was, um, some kind of, perhaps a, a way for Nan to get drugs or something like that, but I decided that that wasn't it and that I didn't have enough information to make any kind of specific conclusion.

The name Mick Phelan struck her as very odd.

> I, it's, it's a strange, it's a different name, it's, it's definitely somebody who is unusual. It must be somebody very important because it's not a regular name, it's not a common name like Joe Smith or whatever. Again, I don't have enough information to draw any conclusions about, um, I know that it, it's going to be a different sort of character, you know.

All of the readers acknowledged to a greater or lesser degree that the book was a construction of the author, but Debbie made far more use of this idea than most of the others, as she attempted to make sense of what was going on.

> Um, when, when, um, Cassy started looking out for her mother, um, the first thing that caught my eye was the, they, um, the two, the two different colours that she saw, the two, the only images of colour that she saw. I couldn't really figure out what it was. At first I thought it was Cassy hallucinating because she was so hungry, but then I read a little more and I remembered back in the beginning where Nan says, She has more sense of course, Cassy never dreams, da-da, da-da. And I thought, well maybe that has something to do with it.

In the early stages, especially of the first reading, some of the other readers appeared to treat the text itself as a transparent means of understanding the characters and the situation. Debbie gave much more of an impression of treating the text as opaque, of using her construal of Cross's shaping as an additional clue in making sense of the story.

> This, this, um description of, of Goldie's room, um, was very vivid and I didn't actually, I couldn't figure out what it was, I thought that it was some sort of re-living of the hippie era or something like that, very psychedelic and very bright, but, um, I couldn't really figure it out. This sort of matched the, the two bits of colour that Cassy saw in the beginning, um, but I couldn't make any more connections between the two.

The first dream puzzled her and she clearly expected an explanation in Chapter 3. When it was not forthcoming, she readjusted her expectations and drew once again on her sense of the potential for shaping the book.

> Again there's this reference to winter aconites back from Chapter 2. Um, apparently it's probably going to be very significant. I expect to see more of it, more references to this particular dream again in the chapters and I noticed that it's very unusual for Cassy to have this constant, um references to this dream and dreaming because she's so sensible.

The yellow lump surprised Debbie; she felt there had been no warning of such a development; she decided to wait for more information. She was also puzzled by Nan's behaviour.

> At first I thought she was similar to Cassy, very sensible and straightforward, very stiff, almost, but, um, at the end here, it, it shows that she's an irregular person, almost, um, sort of inconsistent, she wasn't there, she was there when she shouldn't have been.

By her first reading of Chapter 4, Debbie was still making comments on the workings of the text as well as the puzzles of the plot.

> [The chapter] started a little bit, a little bit slow. At first still wondering about the lump of yellow, why Nan was acting so differently, and then it went on to this strange scene about the masks.

She commented on Robert's ability to keep Goldie and Lyall on track, and went on to consider Lyall's character.

> Um it seems almost that Lyall would be this wolf character and it, it seems like he provokes people, not in, in an anger way, but he provokes people to maybe perhaps do things out of the ordinary it seems, like, having Cassy dream, um, having, making Goldie acting sort of strange.

On the second dream, the Red Riding Hood penny dropped.

> This, this last little bit really, really caught me, how it talks about the checked cloth and the basket, it was red and white cloth. And then I remembered back in, I think it was either Chapter 2 or 3, where Lyall says, *Hello Little Red Riding Hood* or something to that, to that degree, and then I sort of put the two together, and I came sort of to the conclusion, I, I always assume when I read, I came to the conclusion that perhaps this wolf character, this almost sort of enigmatic character, um, will be perhaps chasing, um, Cassy, maybe in dreams or, or whatever, because of the, because of the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Little Red Riding Hood, wolf, wolf chases around, the wolf chases Little Red Riding Hood, and so I'm sort of paralleling the two together.

Her final comments on Chapter 4 summed up the questions that remained to be answered.

> There's still some things that are sort of cut off and I'm trying to figure out what they mean. Um, even going back to Chapter 1 where, what was behind the room, who was that man, what's this lump of yellow, um, sort of on, there's a long way to go so I expect to catch up to it later on.

On her second reading, Debbie was able to make more subtle assessments of character with extra information.

> Well, it's basically the same as I read it the first time. I read it, the first time I read it I was really careful reading it, so, um, I do notice though that, at

> first I thought that Nan would have been, um, not an evil character but sort of a meaner character. But now, reading through, through the whole book, I realize that, you know, um, her intentions were good, not, not, not in a bad way. Um, you also notice that Nan is always trying to cover up the fact that, you know, she's always trying to cover up about her son, even more so than the first time. Now you know why she snaps back to Cassy.

More than character, however, she noticed pattern on her second reading. She raised the possibility of some importance to the number 2, though she struggled to find many examples: the two patches of colour, the two candles, the two taps. She made connections between elements in the story.

> Um, and then, the two patches of startling colour, they sort of stand out with all this dreariness. It seems to me now that it's, it's like, um, um, Lyall and, and Goldie, how they stand out completely in their, in their little, in their ordinary world.

She assumed that the strict wording of the notice on the door was to prevent Mick from entering; unlike many other readers, she did not worry about how to interpret the squat. The Red Riding Hood greeting struck her again.

> *Hello Little Red Riding Hood*--I caught that the first time but now I, I read it again and I, it really puts in my mind sort of like, well, this Cassy's always being chased by some kind of wolf figure and sort of, like, parallels to the story of Little Red Riding Hood.

She commented on how a character might be built up in order to emphasize contrast.

> Um, Lyall, at first, like Nan, I thought he was going to be a, a, for lack of better words, a bad character, but, of course, I know why he's like this, like Nan. I know that he is doing this for the best of Goldie, for the best of Cassy. And I know also, reading all these, um, sort of tenets by, by Nan, don't you go handing it over to Goldie, you have to tell Goldie what to do, sort of like Nan's little prophecies, I know why they make such an emphasis on how sensible she is, is because, so that in the future, when Nan starts acting a little bit unusual, you can see the contrast to these sayings.

She returned to the idea of the aconite; like nearly everyone, she did not have a clear image of this flower so she contributed her speculations.

> I think that the aconite is, um, really represents [the semtex] by it, or, or the, this yellow is represented by the aconite in her, um, in her dream. Um, from what I, I think aconite is some kind of dangerous kind of root, I, I think. I'm kind of speculating here but--um, so you can see the parallel to this dream and Cassy's real life, um, with her father. Um, and, and these dreams don't seem so isolated when you really, when you read ahead.

Debbie said she liked the book as a whole and enjoyed reading it.

> I, I, it was well written, I thought it was, um, it's, it's not usually, it's not what I usually read, the kinds of book I usually read but, um, um, it was, I like the

> way they use, I like the way she, the author used, um, sort of symbol of the wolf and the dreams that Cassy had, um, character development, it was, it was, it was a good book but it was not a great one.

We looked back through the dream sequences. Debbie had been very clear from the first reading of the second dream about the Red Riding Hood link but she commented explicitly on the last dream, the one on page 127.

> This is where, where the dream and real life sort of mix together into one. At first it's the story of Little Red Riding Hood and then, it, Cassy introduces Nan to, into this dream. Then you can, they're now, the real characters are put in place of the fictional characters.

Only a complete transcript would convey everything that Debbie said about *Wolf*, but, try as I may, I cannot find any comments that indicate that she ever engaged herself in the actions and events of the story without perceiving the layer of text in-between. She wondered more than once about Robert, but the textual element remains opaque:

> I found [Robert] a rather unattractive character. He seems very, the way he was portrayed seems very intellectual almost, even though, of course, he doesn't go to school. (first reading)
>
> Um, of course, Robert's not as significant as, as I first thought he was going to be. (second reading)

She spoke of the people in the book as characters rather than as persons; she commented on plot developments but always in a detached way. When Hami talked about how the author composed the book, he spoke in terms of how the construction made him want to read more.

> *Hami*: For the project thing, like, you know, it says it's a big project but what is that project, so I kept on reading it and I found out, and you know, just, the further you went in the book the more you started thinking about it, and it kept, kept on making you going, so I, I thought it was pretty good actually, a good job by the author.

Debbie, too, gave the impression that she thought it was a good job by the author, but she did not speak at all in terms of her own involvement in the story. She drew on her own background in her attempts to make sense of the book; more than once, for example, she raises the hypothesis that the Moongazer set-up is some kind of reincarnation of the hippie era with its psychedelic attributes and we may recall that she is a big fan of the music of The Doors. But, of the ten readers, Debbie was the least emotionally involved, at least at the level of articulating her reactions.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that she did gain enjoyment from the book. The making of connections and finding of patterns clearly intrigued and satisfied her. Hers was much more of an intellectual engagement than most of the others. Where she did express something approaching excitement or engagement, it was in terms of themes and connections, rather than plot ingredients (for example, on the reading of the second dream, "This, this last little bit really, really caught me, how it talks about the checked cloth and the basket, it was red and white cloth.")

Whether her predilection for non-fiction plays a part in this kind of response (or, indeed, which is the chicken and which is the egg) is a good question but one to which there is no evident answer. To what extent her comments were governed by her school experiences, by her impression of how it is appropriate to talk about books in public is another important unknowable.

It is a fairly straightforward matter to list what is positive about Debbie's encounter with *Wolf*: the sense of pattern, of making connections, of composition. What is missing is harder to pin down. Did she fail to describe connections with her own life because she thinks you do not talk that way about books to adults, in official surroundings? Does she never make many connections between her reading and her own life because she largely reads efferently, looking for ways to improve her knowledge? Or does she simply not read that way because she does not need to do so, because it is perfectly possible to read a story without being involved in the lives of the characters, taking, instead, a more detached pleasure in the author's skill and talent? The answers are not clearcut from Debbie's response.

Denise--Grade 11

Denise was a lapsed reader. To the best of her recollection, she learned to read before she started school, and, through elementary school and junior high, she always had a book on the go. Since about Grade 9, she has read very little, blaming her stressful life with too much schoolwork and other unspecified pressures. "Now I want to start reading more," she said, "cause I felt I did a lot better when I read."

Not only does Denise not read now, she also has serious trouble remembering the title of anything she ever has read. She did read *Sweet Valley High* books at one point, but her recollections otherwise were extremely dim.

> *Denise*: When I, yeah, when I was younger I'd read the *Sweet Valley High* or--I read a couple of novels that were really good in Grade 8, I can't remember what they were, but those were more, not so, I'm trying to remember what they were.
>
> *Margaret*: They weren't series books?
>
> *Denise*: No. They weren't series books. I, I really can't remember. All I know is I read a lot.
>
> *Margaret*: Did you always have a book on the go?
>
> *Denise*: Yeah.
>
> *Margaret*: And now you don't.
>
> *Denise*: No.
>
> *Margaret*: And what's the last book that you read before this one? Can you

remember?

> *Denise*: I started reading *Remember this Dream*. I don't know the author. It's about a family that wanted to move to America. I don't remember what exactly the country was but it was older, probably Russia.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Denise*: Wanted to move to America and make a better life.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Denise*: And part of the family didn't go because they liked the old way and then they ended up going and it was a real struggle. It talks about the real adventure that they went through to get this freedom and the price they paid.
>
> *Margaret*: And when were you reading that? Was this a long time ago?
>
> *Denise*: About two months ago.
>
> *Margaret*: And you're still into it?
>
> *Denise*: No.

Denise has no recollection of anyone reading to her when she was small, but she pointed out that she had recognized the fairy tales in *Wolf* so she must have known them as a child.

I asked her what place in the story she felt she occupied as reader: inside a character, standing alongside the characters but invisible, outside the story altogether. Her answer persuaded me that she has indeed had some extensive experience in fiction reading.

> *Denise*: In this story? In some places I felt like I was her but in other places I'd feel like I'm just beside her.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Denise*: In the last story I read, I felt completely out of it, just kind of watching what was going on, so it, I guess it depends on the story and how much I enjoy it.
>
> *Margaret*: And presumably some of it's the way it's written as well.
>
> *Denise*: Yeah. And how I can relate.
>
> *Margaret*: And where, what's the most enjoyable place to be?
>
> *Denise*: What do you mean?
>
> *Margaret*: Well, you said it depends on how much you enjoy it, inside the

> character, along--
>
> *Denise*: Inside the character.
>
> *Margaret*: That's what you like best, is it?
>
> *Denise*: Yeah. It's a lot different than just watching a show, you really feel like you're done [? -- not clear] and it's a nice way of escape.

Denise's reading

If Denise occasionally felt she was inside Cassy's consciousness while reading *Wolf*, as she said, it did not really show in the commentary she provided and it probably occurred while she was reading privately. When she talked about the book, she generally referred to the way the author laid out the text.

> Um, that framed photograph of her father, and she's wondering what he's staring at. I'm not sure, it didn't really get into that too much, but it brought it up a couple of times and I know that it'll be very important in the story.
>
> About this sensible brown eyes, sensible brown hair, the way they described her, they use the word sensible a few times, I'm not sure if that has any significance.

More than any of the others, Denise often resorted to a plot summary as she described her responses to the book, especially in the first reading. She highlighted the main points of the story but added relatively little of her own opinions for long stretches at a time.

Occasionally she provided some insight into her mental processes as she accumulated clues about the story.

> Um, she kept travelling, trying to find her, and by the time she reached it there was a whole bunch of kind of worn-down houses, and it says boarded-up windows and gardens full of rubbish so they wouldn't have been too nice and, um, the one that she finally went to, that her mum was probably in, looked worse than all the rest of them.
>
> And when they, she finally went up to the room, it was a really beautiful room and there was mirrors and candles and her mother was sitting on a mattress and Robert was sitting on the floor, and Goldie told her to come in and she said that her voice was giggly and excited so she must have been kind of a carefree person.

Like Hami, Denise mixed up Lyall and Robert for a few pages. She thought Lyall came to the door, she mentioned Robert sitting on the floor. By the time Cassy went off to her bedroom, however, Denise had the two names (if not the father and son relationship) clear and she made no further mistakes.

The dreams puzzled Denise. As she encountered the first dream for the first time, she spent some time picking over details.

> And then she began to dream, I think this is a dream, um, where it starts talking about the smell of the pine trees round her and that she was walking through the forest, um, with the bright blue sky and the green grass, and I don't understand what they're talking about at the end where it says winter aconites, where she started (inaudible) in her dream, but then she couldn't remember, she knew it had some meaning and then it just went on to say she began to pick the flowers. So, I'm not sure what meaning that would have had. But she seems to not be too overly bothered by this whole situation, it seems that she's very used to it and that she can handle herself very well and adjust, she's really adaptable. But it seems there's something, kind of a mystery that I can't really grab yet.

Again, along with many other readers, Denise noted the childishness of Goldie and Lyall.

> And then they started, Lyall and Goldie just started goofing around and they were acting like children and Cassy wasn't very impressed. Um, she just thought that they should act a lot older than they were and not all this nonsense.

The wolf and the aconite arose together as Denise recounted the lead into the second dream, but it was the inadequacies of Goldie and Lyall that formed the basis of her conclusion about the chapter.

> And then she had to make a mask of a wolf and when somebody said, What we're doing is wolves and winter aconite, that's another thing that keeps coming up, and so she decided, she had a figure of it in her mind and she began to work at it as good as she could, and finally she found the shape and then fell asleep, and then she began having a funny dream about her being, um, that somebody was whispering, a voice in her ear, about where she was going and if she could show the way and that they wanted to play a little game. And that's all I can really get from it, is that she wasn't impressed with the way they were acting, grown-ups, especially when she's the one that has to be the mature one.

On her second reading, Denise, of course, had a clearer idea of where the plot was going, and she commented in the first chapter on what she now knew that Cassy did not.

> That knock was really important in the story because it represented that her father was there but she never knew this. She just knew that something was strange and she could hear, um, Nan, which was her grandmother, talking.
>
> Um, also when she said when she gave her the bag of food, not to be handing it to Goldie, to keep it to herself, um, to take good care of it and to keep it in a safe place, and now, that was because of the yellow stuff that was in the bottom, that also had to do with her father that was there, but at this time she had no idea that, she wasn't even allowed to say her father's name.

Reading Chapter 2, she remarked on Lyall's rudeness "which he carried through the whole story." She now identified the Red Riding Hood motif but was not clear what to make of it.

> Um, there's one sentence in here, I'm not sure what it has to do with the rest of it, that said Little Red Riding Hood, cause I know in the end where she's addressed as Little Red Riding Hood from her father.

She was also now identifying some of the other threads of the story.

> Um, this is the chapter where she, um, she ends up staying there and they fix her room. Not too much really happened but she just unpacked and went to bed after they were introduced and then she went to sleep and put her, the picture on the mantel and it talked about how the eyes wouldn't stare at her, and I think it might have something to do with later in the story about who he turns out to be and what he's like. And about the dream--I still don't understand it. (laughs)

Denise was noticing more about the construction of the story on the second reading.

> Um, Robert made a joke about the food, saying, It's not exactly a feast but it'll keep the wolf from the door, and she didn't understand what he was talking about, she thought it was just a joke that she was left out of, but, as we learn more about wolves in the story, it has a lot more to do with it.

She made connections both as she read and also as she talked about her reading.

> Okay and then they started talking about this brilliant idea of Goldie's and it turned out to be of wolves and that's what they had to make the masks of. And then Lyall, I never caught this part before, but he said that it was wolf, boy, that's what they were doing. And it really fits together now that I've read the story about the wolf and Goldie, and Goldie must have known something, that's why the, she came up with the idea of the wolf.

As we discussed the final dream and the whole sequence of the dreams, Denise revealed more of her sense of the book's structure.

> *Denise*: And then she ended up falling asleep and then dreaming and it, these dreams are quite, I don't know how to describe them. I don't really understand them, how it fits, but I understand that it's her subconscious probably dealing with her father and what she doesn't know.
>
> *Margaret*: Do the dreams remind you of any other story?
>
> *Denise*: Little Red Riding Hood.
>
> *Margaret*: In what way?
>
> *Denise*: In that, just this chapter, or overall?
>
> *Margaret*: Overall.

> *Denise*: In the whole book, um, it just describes how she's going through the forest and how she's got the basket in her left hand and how she goes to the cottage and also what, when she does go in, she asks where Nan is and he says he ate her, and then, there's another thing that he said, it, it was really parallel with that story.
>
> *Margaret*: And did you notice this while you were reading it or did it just sort of dawn on you after you had finished?
>
> *Denise*: During.
>
> *Margaret*: During.
>
> *Denise*: Because it was quite soon after Chapter 4 that they started getting into that, and also that note.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Denise*: That was left on the van for her, said, it was addressed to Little Red Riding Hood from the Wolf.
>
> *Margaret*: What did you think of the way these two stories were put into, into the same book?
>
> *Denise*: Actually, I really enjoyed it, it, it was a little more familiar.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Denise*: But at the same time it turned something really innocent into something a lot more dramatic and really capturing your attention.

In her comments on the book as a whole, Denise also reflected on the composition of the text.

> *Denise*: I thought it was really interesting the way it was put together. Um, the way things connect from the beginning to the end where you don't have a clue at the beginning, um, it, it kept my attention the whole way through because you had to really keep thinking. It didn't just tell you, you had to really figure things out. Um, there were some things didn't, that didn't really fit together with me, some of the dreams, I couldn't really piece it together. And I think the characters were pretty consistent, except for Lyall, when they were writing about it. I didn't think he was very consistent because at some times there'd be, that he was really soft but usually he was always hard, but then it said that he'd be walking away laughing, you know, down the stairs with Goldie after he'd been yelling, and then he'd act like nothing was wrong and talk to Cassy, and, and I don't know if that was very consistent.
>
> *Margaret*: Would you recommend it to somebody else to read?
>
> *Denise*: If that, yeah, if that's the kind of stuff they enjoy. It depends on their personality type.

Margaret: Right.

Denise: But, yeah, it was very well put together, a neat book.

We can perhaps see here that Denise, like Hami, was drawn through the book by a kind of curiosity which involved questions about how the author was going to make things "fit" as well as (or maybe, in her case, almost instead of) questions about what was going to happen to the characters. Being intrigued is an affective reaction but it is not the same kind of engagement as the feeling of being involved. With Debbie and Denise, this more intellectual and detached response is apparent, and it is worth noting that both of them claimed to enjoy the book.

The ongoing difficulty of getting inside somebody else's reading is clear to me in these two transcripts. Neither Debbie nor Denise made the kind of personal connections with their own lives which played such an important part in the conversations with Candace, Ed and Keith. This may mean that they did not use the resource of their own lives when it came to making sense of the book, but it may also, and more simply, mean that they did not feel it appropriate to articulate such strategies when it came to a public discussion of their reading. I have no evidence to support either conclusion.

Whatever the cause, in both cases the interviews were more formal and impersonal than most of the others. Debbie spoke in more "schooled" terms than some of the other readers. With Denise, I had a feeling that she was speaking with some reticence, especially when she talked about the stresses that had reduced her time and interest for reading. There was no reason for either of them to speak to me in terms of any personal intimacy and they chose not to do so; they were at all times, however, friendly, helpful, and positive about their experiences with *Wolf*.

Both girls conveyed a sense of some excitement over elements of the construction of the book. Debbie was "really, really caught" by the mention of the basket in the forest; Denise commented very approvingly on the parallel use of the Red Riding Hood story: "[I]t turned something really innocent into something a lot more dramatic and really capturing your attention."

Is that enough? Could they have enjoyed the book without "feeling along" with Cassy, without getting caught up in the suspense of the action? I am expressing caution over the conditions of the interview situation because I think we do not have enough information to answer that question. Perhaps the satisfaction of enjoying the clever construction of the book was entirely adequate; on the other hand, perhaps these readers animated the characters with some of their own emotions and simply did not mention this aspect of their reading.

What is clear is that they both did like the way the book was put together; that much of their enjoyment was based on their pleasure in the way Gillian Cross used one story to illuminate and shadow the other. In the pilot study tape of Susan, the English graduate, reading the second dream, there is a point where she actually squeals, "Ooh!" as she takes in some of the implications of the Red Riding Hood parallel. To use that response as a kind of shorthand, there was evidence of both Debbie and Denise experiencing something of that "Ooh!" Both of them express pleasure as the shape and complexity of the narrative begins to reveal itself. With or without some form of emotional commitment to the characters, this response includes an affective element which is important in the reading of fiction and probably of all literary texts.

Intellectual engagement with text

Louise Rosenblatt makes the helpful contrast between efferent and aesthetic reading. Efferent reading is marked by what you take away from it; aesthetic reading emphasizes the importance of what goes on as you read, a dwelling in the world of the text. Used in conjunction with David Gelernter's metaphor of the way our minds can operate at high or low focus, Rosenblatt's distinction gives us some vocabulary for discussing the importance of how Debbie and Denise approached the text.

I drew on Gelernter's account of the mind in order to explore the way in which readers might draw on their own emotional understandings to animate their readings of character and event in a story. What Debbie and Denise describe in these accounts of reading *Wolf* (and what all the readers described to a greater or lesser degree) is something rather different. Making connections and noticing patterns in the arrangement of the text is, in Gelernter's terms, a "higher-focus" form of activity than the kind of controlled affect linking that emotional engagement with characters and plot may lead to. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the two girls are reading in a more efferent way (always allowing for the fact that once readers begin to describe their reactions a degree of efference is inevitable).

These two girls are describing a different kind of aesthetic reading. They are not dwelling in the story situation, at least as they describe their responses, but they are dwelling in the text. They are picking up connections for the pleasure of expanding their understanding of the nature of the text. It is clear from their remarks and those of many others, including Susan, the pilot study reader who so enjoyed the complexity of the dreams, that making connections and working out patterns can be pleasurable in itself and for its own sake.

It is tempting to reach for phrases such as "more sophisticated" or "advanced" to describe this kind of textual pleasure. Certainly this approach to a piece of literature is one which is approved of and rewarded in many English classes and many English examinations. Clearly it is easy to prod such a text-based response over the border into the territory of efferent, where it can be treated as evidence of skill and where it can be given a grade. As seems to be evident in the more formal nature of the conversations I had with these two girls, discussing the constructedness of the text is an activity which can be more readily made public; it is a less intimate way of describing a reading.

And yet, although I think all of these factors are true, I do not want to discount the importance of finding and enjoying pattern, connection, *texture* in a text as an affectively important experience. I have enjoyed reading *Wolf* many times, but more of my own pleasure has come from this appreciation of complexity and interweaving than from a sense direct empathy with Cassy, who is actually presented in a fairly distancing way by Cross. (Who wants to identify with all that sensibleness anyway?)

Carol Shields (1987) has described this kind of intellectual engagement as "that sharp electrical fusing that sometimes occurs when art meets the mind head-on." (29) It is not the same thing as emotional engagement with the situation of the story, but it has its own excitement which can be equally if differently intense.

There are many complex issues at work here. *Wolf* is a book for adolescents and in many ways does not exceed the parameters of the genre. Yet it raises questions which are important in more substantial works of literature as well. To what extent is pleasure in reading enhanced or curtailed by an awareness of the workings of the words? To what extent may the reader's delight be enhanced by suggestiveness rather than explication, as with the initial possibility that the basket in the first dream is operating metonymously? To the best of my recollection, I registered the significance of that basket on the very first mention and my pleasure was increased by realizing that I had indeed "caught on" to something important.

Daniel, the Ph.D. pilot study student, said that his early reading of a book is always wary. This is what he said on his first reading:

> You know, the first chapter in a book for me is very difficult because I'm always, I always think that it might be one more of those I don't get into. Because there are ones like that. I mean, I have tried to read *Midnight's Children* three times, I have, and I've gotten fifty pages into it and I give up because there are no connections that are ever made, you know. So I was a bit concerned in the first--well, not too concerned, like, I felt it probably would happen, would happen very quickly in Chapter 2.

He returned to this theme on his second reading and said something very similar.

> I know I have, before I start reading a book, in any context, not just this one, some anxiety about being interested in this book. And I always think about that when I start. Okay, when's it going to be that I get it, that I catch on to what's going on? When's it going to be? I know that that affects the reading. You know, I always know two or three pages into it where I'm more relaxed and all of a sudden I'm really reading for understanding.

What Daniel is describing here is a mixture of intellectual and highly affective questions. The involvement of the reader in character and event is affectively charged, but so is the involvement of the reader with the text at the level of the arrangement of words on the page. It is possible to make a mistake in reading, to fail to come to terms with the text; Greg, in his irritation over his misunderstanding of the colour of semtex, provides one small example of a reader feeling that the text has not dealt with him fairly.

Daniel describes a specific situation, at the beginning of a new book, which is charged with anxiety for the reader; Susan, squealing with excitement as she recognizes that the text is more complex than she had anticipated, describes a different emotion but also a powerful one.

There is no question that an additional charge surrounded the situation involving these particular readings of *Wolf* and the interviews which followed. Debbie and Denise provide two examples of reaction to their participation in the study. Debbie was one of four students who volunteered to take part in the project at a school where I had planned to involve only two students. The four possible subjects drew straws and Debbie was not chosen. She was so disappointed that her friend, who had been selected, bowed out and left the opening for Debbie. Denise did not display such eagerness originally, but participating also seemed to be important to her; between the first reading and the second reading she was ill (which led to her falling behind with her school work) and then moved house; several times I suggested to her that, if her life was too frantic, we could cut our losses and forget the second reading. She was adamant that she wanted to go ahead with it, and the second reading duly took place more than a month after the first.

So we have several layers of affect at work in these readings. The situation of the interviews which involved novelty, prestige and a sense of being singled out from classmates; the anxiety and determination to do well in the reading and be helpful to the researcher which clearly motivated everybody; the apprehension about whether or not the reader would "get" and/or enjoy the book itself; the dawning recognition, in many cases, that the book was complex and many-layered and offered more than a simple story-line; the sense of a mystery in the story, the quest for an answer and the reflection on some of the implications of that answer; the simple matching of a reader's emotional schema with the demands of a situation in the text; all these various levels of emotion were at work during the readings of the text. It is perhaps surprising that there was even room for anything so simple and yet so demanding as delight. Yet, there is no question that this response also featured in the reading of many, though not all, of the students involved.

Wrap-up, chunking and cohesion re-visited

Discovering patterns and connections in a story involves a specialized, more literary use of basic reading strategies such as the useful chunking of information for the working memory and the making of cohesive links across "chunk boundaries." There are many examples in the transcripts of Debbie and Denise making such links. The process as I described it in Chapter 3 appears to be fairly utilitarian--and also fairly basic and straightforward. Obviously we need to condense information for storage; obviously we need to make connections between groups of data that will not be useful if they remain disparate. I confirmed the importance of these tactics for myself recently, when I tried to read a scholarly essay in French. The subject was one with which I was familiar, my vocabulary was adequate to the challenge, and I could make sense of any one sentence separately; but I did not have the linguistic resources to make connections between segments and build up some overall sense of where the paper was going. The material was not esoteric but I did not have the basic tools to work out some sense of the overall strategy of its organization.

In writing *Wolf*, Gillian Cross, however, is not merely accumulating a selection of information items which the reader must load into memory and then assemble productively (although she is doing that as well). She is also playing with reference and word form, with very particular uses of fragmentation and association.

The use of the dreams and the stories in *Wolf* provide a helpful case study of a particular specialized form of cohesion. It is possible to take the dreams out of the context of the book and reassemble them as a single narrative; I did just that by means of photocopying and pasting. The linkage from one dream to another is quite clear-cut. The characters of Red Riding Hood and the wolf, implied but not specified until near the end, carry over from one dream to another. Their absence from the story fragments actually functions cohesively; we recognize the territory as strangely amorphous but familiar from earlier dreams. The incidents follow each other in the same order as in the standard telling of the story. Even the last sentence of one dream and the first sentence of the next can be put together with not much evidence of a seam. The reader, therefore, is encouraged to make the link backwards over two chapters, to anticipate something more of the same, two chapters later. All the readers, even the student who skipped the dreams altogether, realized with very little trouble or doubt that the dreams *belonged together*.

The story of the werewolf raises similar issues. In the version of the story which I included in my analysis of *Wolf*, I took out all the interruptions and restored the story to a single unified text. In the book, of course, there are numerous interruptions. The story is short but it takes the best part of a page and a half for Lyall to tell it.

Here is the full text of the werewolf story. Cassy has gone to get a knife and fork so she can eat her curry and she is climbing back up the stairs, angry with the others.

> Lyall's voice met her half-way. Not his ordinary speaking voice, but something richer and darker and deeper. Even before she could make out the words, it sent a long, fascinated shiver across the back of her shoulders. And then, as she reached the last few steps, she heard what he was saying.
>
> '". . . and you must do it at the next full moon," said the wise woman. "For it is *bzou*, the werewolf, who troubles your sleep and he cannot be destroyed, except by this silver bullet."'
>
> Cassy hesitated for a moment, her hand on the stair rail. What was going on *now*?
>
> '"But be warned!"' Lyall's voice was sharper now, every word distinct. '"You must not speak of this--not even to your dear father. If you do, the bullet will lose its power and there will be nothing to save you."'
>
> Creeping up the last few stairs, Cassy moved carefully into the room and sat down beside Goldie. Lyall's voice did not waver and neither of the others looked round as she scooped food on to her plate. Goldie was sitting spellbound, her hand half-way to her mouth, and Robert was rolling a piece of chapatti in his fingers as he stared at Lyall.
>
> 'The girl thanked her and went home,' Lyall continued. 'She hid the gun and the silver bullet under her pillow and spoke of them to no one. Not even to her father. But at the next full moon . . . '
>
> He paused, not teasing, but drawing them into the story. Slowly Cassy put down her fork, watching his eyes.
>
> 'At the next full moon,' he murmured, 'she was woken by soft, heavy footsteps under her window. They padded to the door, and there was a muffled tap, low down. Two taps, and then a pause, and then two more . . .'
>
> Cassy's breath caught suddenly in her throat and time stopped, so that the words went on and on repeating themselves in her head. *Two taps, and then a pause, and then two more* . . . She forgot the warm plate on her knees and the tangle of flames and mirrors all around her. All she could see was the picture that leapt into her mind.

> The hand lifted to tap twice and then twice again. Tapping on the spotless, blue-painted door that she knew better than any door in the world.
>
> The door of Nan's flat.
>
> Now she knew when she had heard that signal. She knew why it had come so easily to her hand the day before. She knew--a hundred things that exploded suddenly in her head, like the answers to questions she had never wanted to ask.
>
> 'For an instant,' murmured Lyall, still telling his story, 'she saw the terrible face at the window. The grey muzzle, the pricked ears and the long, murderous fangs. Shaking with terror, she pulled the pistol from under her pillow--and fired!'
>
> 'And then?' breathed Goldie.
>
> Lyall's voice was soft now, every syllable crystal-clear. 'Then she opened the door and a body slumped across her feet. It was the body of her father, with a bullet hole in his left temple.'
>
> Cassy picked up a chapatti with trembling hands, and ripped it in half. (64 - 66, ellipses in original)

The reader must make the connections across the interruptions, but also take note of the interruptions as they occur: they break up the story, using the power of segmentation to direct the reader's attention, increasing the number of starting and stopping points with an inevitable impact on the rules of notice. Furthermore, the reader needs to make links from the interruptions themselves to the earlier points in the story to which they refer; the knock on Nan's door, Cassy's own use of the same knock the day before. Cohesion works at a level of vocabulary, at a level of incident, but also at a level of pattern. For it is very clear that the reader is called upon, not only to connect up the interrupted story and to make the associations between the interruptions and the earlier elements of the story, but to observe and either make sense of, or at least wonder about, the connection between Lyall's story and the main story of the book itself, Gillian Cross's story, *Wolf*. At the most obvious level, that connection comes through the link-point of the two taps, but there is a much more complicated inter-weaving going on. Any precise description of the cohesive links to and from this section of the text would have to be very elaborate.

Readers, of necessity, must assemble some form of the gist of Lyall's progression through the story as they meet every interruption; the story so far must be stored in working memory. They must make some attempt to link the two taps and Cassy's suddenly focused attention with the already established mysteries of the plot. They must remember the mirror room and the candles. And they must alternate between these different activities. At the simplest level, they must also remember to make the connections between the numerous references to the eating of the meal which continue throughout the telling of the werewolf story.

Clearly, to talk about a single issue of finding a balance point between simple accuracy and simple momentum is to create an inadequate description of what the text requires at this point. The reader can only move forward in the text by connecting backwards, by re-activating stored memories of what happened earlier. This activity is alternated with the narrative of Lyall's story which, in its high-powered suspense, teased out by interruption and delay, impels the reader forward. What is established is not a simple and straightforward momentum, but rather a rhythm which is built into the text at the level of the specific words, not at the level of the actual events of either story.

The dreams, on a larger scale, also establish a rhythm in the reading. Realizing how that rhythm will be working is part of the pleasure of reading *Wolf*. Several readers mentioned their enjoyment of the elements of symmetry between the story of Red Riding Hood and the story of Cassy and Mick. References to the rhythm of reading, to the point and counterpoint of the two stories, were more veiled, but at least some of the readers registered something of the effect.

It may be that rhythm of reading is actually one kind of solution to the conflicting requirements of accuracy and momentum. If the momentum of the text is not all in a simple forward direction, there are consequences for the way in which you can enjoy reading the story. You are obliged to linger, to think forwards and backwards, and not just in the cause of improving accuracy.

What is the impact of this kind of rhythmic reading on the question of a "good enough" reading? Those readers who made the Little Red Riding Hood connection seem not to have been surprised right "out of" the story, so if good enough is defined as "good enough to maintain engagement with the fiction," there is no sense of disruption. Instead there seems to be evidence of a feeling of enhancement. As mothers regularly tell their children, "Good enough can always be better," and in the transcripts of these readers, there appears to be a sense that their reading was enlarged by their awareness of the wolf motif and the fairy tale connection.

Not every reader reacts in the same way to the same text. Some of *Wolf*'s reviewers found the Red Riding Hood connection forced and unconvincing. It is possible that if you find the dream sections unpersuasive and over-laboured, you may indeed be irritated "out of" the fictional world, if only temporarily.

The author as virtual other

Most of the readers made at least some comments about the text as constructed in a particular way. They were conscious of shape--in part, I suspect, because the shaping of *Wolf* is very deliberate and difficult to overlook. Does this fact mean that they were also conscious of Gillian Cross, or of an implied author, acting as shaper? Did they show any signs of creating for themselves an awareness of a virtual other, standing behind the nature of the text as it was arranged?

It seems to me, looking at these transcripts, that the answer to that question is both yes and no. It is interesting to look at the pronouns the readers used when they talked about the book and how it was written. Many of them used a kind of all-purpose "they"; one or two used "she"; Denise, more often than not, said "it". On one occasion Denise said, instead, "the book says," which suggests that she was moving no further than the impersonal authority of the print on the page. In fact, however, she also made use of "she" and "they", so the issue is not as clear-cut as all that.

Who is this "they"? Possibly the nearest relation is the generic "you" of scripts. "They" appears to be used in an open, neutral sense. There is an element of the virtual other involved but it appears to be a very shadowy and schematic one. *Somebody* had to have written this, so somebody did. None of the readers had come across Gillian Cross before and I strongly suspect that this fact made a difference in the degree to which they took an interest in the persona behind the arrangement of words. Several of them were prepared to take an interest in her after the reading, inquiring about other books she has written. During the reading, however, they marked the place of the author but left it open. As part of the pattern, the author was a necessary ingredient, the "they" who set the words in place. The readers expected her to behave scrupulously (witness Greg's severe irritation when he thought she had cheated) and they were prepared to admire the consequences of her decisions. Whatever was animated in the readings, however, does not appear to have included any vivid sense of Gillian Cross, real or implied. And yet, at the level of the text, she could not be subtracted. At her most invisible, she was turned into an "it" but her place was clearly marked.

It may also be that the author's place in the text--intrusive, restrained, assumed only tacitly, or whatever--may form another kind of large-scale cohesion. Certainly, issues of wrap-up and cohesion take on new complexity and power when they are applied to a literary text.

Chapter 8

"HERE, IT'S RIGHT HERE! FAMILIAR BUT UNRECOGNIZED": COMMITTED AND EXCITED READING

One Grade 11 student warrants her own chapter. Unlike all the other readers, she was thrilled by the book. *Wolf* appeared to open doors and windows onto entirely new ways of reading for this girl, and she was excited and appreciative. There were specific factors in her background which may have contributed to this success story, but she also serves as a useful example of how a book may exceed all our expectations.

Joanna--Grade 11

To a large extent, Joanna was another ex-reader. Pressures of time have reduced her reading habit, but she has also found that, if the books she reads are too long (she cited Stephen King), she gets bored. She used to read Harlequin Romances--"just books that I can sort of get into my own little world, just escape from everything else." Now, it would seem, she has given up even on those. Her attempts to recall the last book she had read were illuminating.

> *Joanna*: Um, I'm trying to think about the last book I read. (laughs)
>
> *Margaret*: That's good because that's the next question I was going to ask you.
>
> *Joanna*: Okay. (laughs) What was it? I used to read a lot in Grade 9, I read just tons of little books that I found in the school library and stuff. Now, what was the last book I read? I think it was in September [this was late February] and I went to the public library and it was by Richard Peck. I don't know if you know him.
>
> *Margaret*: Oh yes.
>
> *Joanna*: *Those Summer Girls I Never Met?*
>
> *Margaret*: *I've Never Known*, I think, or something.
>
> *Joanna*: *I've Never Known.* I loved that book too. It was so, it was really kind of, tugged at one's heartstrings.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.
>
> *Joanna*: Um, and Danielle Steel, my mother reads Danielle Steel. And I've always wanted to pick up one of her books but they're so long. And I'm thinking I can't take too much of those Harlequin Romance things so I figured, start, read 10 pages and I'll just put it down, so I (inaudible) I read magazines. That's what I've started on now, I read lots of magazines.

These magazines include *Reader's Digest*, *Canadian Living*, *Seventeen* and *YM.* She reads the advice columns and some of the fiction.

> And they also, they also have, um, a little, not really essays but little stories written by people, like, well, younger people, 20, 30, and it's totally fiction and it's really, the last one I read, it was a page and a half and it was so, it was liberating, sort of, not really, I, I don't know how to put it, um, more something to get your mind off of things. . . . But yet it involved you in that and, and it just made you feel really good. Feel-good stories.

Although she spoke of fiction, I was never certain that Joanna's distinction between fiction and non-fiction was secure, so she may have meant true-life stories in this description.

She doesn't read many books any more, Joanna says, because she doesn't have time to go to the library and try to figure out what she might like to read.

> You just know when you go and they've got the fiction, there's like aliens and all this, that's, that's not the kind of stuff I want to read. I mean, I will, they'll have their scientific talk and all that. I don't, I want to understand what I'm reading and I, I want my brain to sort of work while I'm reading, not be disgusted by what I read.

Joanna was born in Romania and lived there until she was five. She moved to Canada and learned English and learned to read more or less together. She remembers being encouraged by the friendliness of the children in school, but she does not recall a great deal about learning to read.

> I, I do remember I liked to read, I did, and I'd read those Jane and Dick and their dog Spot and stuff like that, I remember little bits and pieces, and how they had the, the readers in elementary, but I don't remember a lot.

Throughout her childhood, Joanna's father read Romanian fairy tales to his children, and she spoke fondly of these experiences.

> My dad would always read to us. He, except, he wouldn't read to us in English, we'd have our Romanian fairy tales and I always loved sitting by him and just, we had one story, it was, it was so pretty, um I'm just trying to think, I don't think I could translate it well. But also the authors, the Romanian authors, the images they provide in their words, they're so, they totally paint the picture. Some of the, some of the material I read, just kids' books and stuff like that, if you don't have the picture there it means nothing. And these, these books, they were, like, big thick books like that, and all words. . . . So really, the whole story, the whole image is in the words.

I tried to draw out of her whether the Romanian fairy tales would have provided her with a useful repertoire for the reading of *Wolf*, but she was more interested in talking about the impact of so much exposure to pictureless books and how this element in her background featured in her reading of *Wolf*.

> Usually I always, I can always picture the houses, the place they, this takes place and I can picture this. Usually I'll relate it to a neighbourhood I know and I can almost just picture this house. How the boxes, the soggy boxes are in the corner with, and how the tap is. The tap, the renovation element of it I

> can picture because our house has been--and it was horrible, absolutely horrible, but, um, I really liked, I could, I could actually see the flats, how it was kind of raised, you walked up the stairs and the door, there were separate doors to each flat. Yup.

As a rule, Joanna does not re-read. "Once is enough." She did suggest that it might actually be beneficial to read *Wolf* for a second time, "but I don't think I'd do it, even though I'd, I'd miss little parts. If I was to do a report on it, then of course I'd, I'd have to go back."

Joanna's reading history included the little Peter Rabbit books, Dr. Seuss, the Berenstein Bears.

> And then as I got into Grade 6, I started reading *Sweet Valley*, *Sweet Valley High*, and I remember how much I enjoyed them. I, I actually quit reading *Sweet Valley High* when I was in about Grade 8 and the last book I read, I did a report on it for my Language Arts thing, but I, now that I look back at, at what children like, I can, I think how silly, but, but yet the, just the way, the way children's books are written so that children can identify with them.

Reading Stephen King led to arguments with her father who tried to screen her reading.

> But, the more he tried to keep me away from it, the, the curiouser I got, the more curious I got, and I always thought, well, yeah, I can't wait to read that one, so-and-so said it was a really, really good book. And some of the times where I finally got to reading it, I'd always hide them under my pillow and in my bed drawers and stuff. When I finish reading I thought, well that was no good anyway, you know. Gee. But, but, um, even, I, I didn't think, I didn't think I'd, I'd read thick books. I, I was always, I'll be honest, I was lazy.

Getting other titles from Joanna was not easy, but she did mention Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* and also spoke approvingly of *Beauty* by Robin McKinley which she read in Grade 9 and loved.

When she does read now, it is at night on the way to sleep. "That's not a good time to read because you're tired and the only reason you're actually reading something is so you can induce sleep. And so you're not really catching on."

Joanna's reading

Joanna stood out from all the other readers in one very striking way: she loved *Wolf*. Where the others were polite about it, she was ecstatic. She was excited, intrigued, engaged. She phoned her brother up to tell him about the wonderful book she had been reading, she talked at great length to her English teacher about her great pleasure in this reading project. When I met her for the second time, she wanted to start straight in discussing the book as a whole and could barely restrain herself to re-read the opening chapters first, let alone wait for the tape recorder to be plugged in.

Her response to the first reading of the first chapter was to plunge in and raise a number of questions. There was no issue of a detached reading here; she wanted to know how things were going to work out.

> I'm curious why she's not living with her mother and she's living with Nan. And I noticed the picture of her dad when he was a young boy on her dresser with his mother, and she's wondering, you know, what does he look like, where is he now?
>
> And Mick Phelan--I'm thinking that might be her dad. I guess she shouldn't say that name out loud, so maybe, I'm kind of curious about that, why she shouldn't say it out loud.
>
> And, um, it surprises me that her mother doesn't have food in the house, that Nan packs her a lot of food.

Joanna read attentively; she was alone among the ten readers in picking up the fact that Lyall is black. She noticed the Red Riding Hood greeting, "so I'm thinking her school mac is red." Like a number of other readers, she wondered about some kind of hippie motif in the mirror room.

Joanna commented on her personal reactions to characters and events.

> It didn't surprise me that Robert was up making breakfast because, in the chapters before, Goldie was, she, like, she couldn't fend for herself and everything, everybody had to do the things for her. But, um, I thought they were just unemployed bums kind of thing, and this Moongazer shows, that surprised me a little. And Goldie trying to think, that's just another example, Goldie's not really her own person and she doesn't think for herself.

In the early stages of the book, she also made occasional references to the constructed nature of the book.

> [The mention of the aconites] just sort of blocks everything out of her mind so that must have been a significant thing.
>
> These masks, I guess they have something to do with the title of the book.

The first dream puzzled her.

> And this dream. She must be a forest and [pause] going to pick flowers. I don't really understand dreams but I'm just trying to think what the flowers could symbolise. But that's all I see.

In her encounter with the second dream, however, it seems possible that we actually have a record of the moment her enthusiasm ignited.

> *Joanna*: And then she falls back into that dream, so, the exact same dream with the aconite and this, Where are you going? Can I show you the way? Maybe that's the wolf.

> *Margaret*: Mmm hmm.
>
> *Joanna*: And perhaps--oh, I get this! The Little Red Riding Hood. (laughs) How the Little Red, how Lyall called her Little Red Riding Hood. Maybe the wolf's enticing her to, to come with him, he'll show her the way. Yeah! Oh my God! Here, it's right here! *Familiar but unrecognized*. It's, it's like, um, like Lyall's voice when he said, when he called her Little Red Riding Hood. Yup. And a huskiness, sort of. Mmm hmm. It's, it's pretty--I just got it right now. (laughs) Yup. Oh, oh! And right here, *a head with prickled ears turning slightly upwards towards the moon* [a reference to Cassy's model of the wolf, at the top of page 34], whereas they're the Moongazers. Okay. Yeah. It's sort of reading between the lines. Okay. Anything else? Well, when Goldie said that she's the one, that she kept trying to make, just wait, *wolves and winter aconite*. Is this what she's thinking or just sort of--it's on page 32, right at the bottom.
>
> *Margaret*: In the italics there?
>
> *Joanna*: Yeah.
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah, I think that's Cassy's thoughts.
>
> *Joanna*: Mmm. Yeah, she's sort of making a connection between them, wolves and winter aconite. And yet, in her dream, it seems she dreams something in connection with what went on that day. A significant event that went on in the day. Yeah.

In her second reading, Joanna picked up small points in Chapter 1 which now made more sense, but as she spoke about Chapter 2, she returned straight to the question of the dreams again.

> How, how she saw a patch of yellow right at the back of the clearing and how, in the dream, specifically picked winter aconites which I guess are yellow and she needed, for some reason, she needed to know the, the other name for it, something with wolf.

We established that the name she couldn't remember was wolf-bane and she wanted to know the meaning of it. "Like, but specifically bane."

She was curious about details of the squat.

> Um, I'm kind of curious, if they took the wood off the windows why would it look worse? Like, were the windows broken or something? Hmm. Cause I know, we were, we were renovating our house and we added a full addition on to the front, and when we put the wood, plywood over the openings in the windows, it looked really, really, closed in, but then when you take them, well, we took them off to put the windows in, it didn't look that bad.

She commented again on Lyall's greeting to Little Red Riding Hood and said, "That's, it seems like a little piece of a puzzle, how her father called her Little Red Riding Hood in the note that he left her."

She was also thinking about the pattern of the book as a whole when she commented on Goldie.

> When, when Cassy's wondering, you know, she could never picture her mum working, I think it shows how little faith she has in her, and that, in turn, affects right in the end when she, in fact, saves her.

When I asked her to comment on her reactions to the whole book, she began to develop delicate and subtle insights. The sense of her thinking aloud in some of these comments is almost palpable.

> Um, I thought, when, actually let's just stay over here at the wolves here [on page 33]. She, um, I suppose she still thinks that it's no big deal about--she doesn't understand why they're trying to make the wolves thing, but, in fact, how I saw it was that Goldie, Goldie still held some sort of torch for Mick and since he liked the wolves so much, I still can't put it together why she would have, why she, I guess I can see that she, she wanted to have some sort of part of him, just (inaudible). And then when they're, when they're at the zoo, when they go to the zoo, and, um, she, she makes, Goldie makes Cassy not--makes her promise not to tell, um, Lyall that, that Mick really liked wolves and would have loved to go into the cage of the wolf.

In this passage, Joanna is thinking very hard about what makes the plot tick, and her perceptions about Goldie are developing as she speaks. She goes on to establish a very complex reading of Lyall's werewolf story and its relationship to the main plotline.

> And then when Lyall says, um, when Lyall tells them that story abut how the werewolf, well some sort of wolf, was at the girl's window and she wasn't to tell her father about the silver bullet that would shoot the wolf, well, every morning, well, the mornings that her father would come in and Nan would send him away, he would walk past her window and then when, when the girl shot him, shot the wolf, she went out to see who it was, it was her father.

Joanna is right about the parallels between Mick outside Cassy's window and the werewolf story; furthermore, this was a passage outside the four chapters which we looked at together so she arrived at this analysis completely on her own. She moved on from this example to describe her view of the whole book.

> And I thought that was very, sort of, it all ties in, it's like a, it's like a big story, fairy tale kind of thing, yet not really. And slowly, when she's putting it all, she's trying to put it together, and she says, now, you know, how she's understanding more and more.

There are elements of sophistication and detailed recall in these comments on the structure of the text which surpass most of what the other readers produced, yet Joanna did not disengage herself from the emotive aspects of the contents. Like many other readers, she had very definite hopes about the ending.

> And, um, let's see, I, then at the end, this, this is what I was hoping would happen. I was hoping that Goldie and her father were seeing each other and I was kind of hoping that right when she was giving her emotional speech, like,

> *Wolves don't leave their children*, I was hoping that he'd kind of leave the life of crime and come back and they'd be a big family again.

Later she modified this opinion slightly.

> I liked it very much, and, um, I was surprised about the ending but thought it sort of worked out for the best. And everybody was happy, and how, how Goldie came through, she's she still believed her daughter, but how Cassy didn't really, I think she was still under the influence of her grandmother that Goldie was no good, Goldie couldn't do anything on her own. And right, right at the end, how she, how she, she, even though her father did all this stuff, she still wanted to know stuff about him.

In the first comment, we can see what Squire describes as a reader being happiness-bound, although this attitude is modulated somewhat in the second remark. There is no question that Joanna was affectively engaged in the outcome of the story. At the same time, she was intellectually engaged with the arrangement of the text and even with the role of individual words. She talked about the Moongazer show in the school.

> Okay, well, when all, all the children, they picture the wolves as hungry and bloodthirsty and all that, and sort of threatening, but really, that, that's not what, after, after Lyall shows them the videos and stuff, and how it's not really what they are, and then how he asks what are these pictures that you've drawn? Werewolves! And I'm just, I'm just thinking, people, if you split the word werewolves into one, one, into two words, it's *were wolves*, so, so I guess, um, I don't know how to explain it but I can't--I know what I want to say but I don't know how to say it. Sort of how they were wolves, well, you know, they were just, I mean, they weren't bloodthirsty or anything and, like, people made, people just, sort of, like, twisted them and made something sort of horrid out of them. And, um, and then that sort of, that sort of a picture that everybody sees when they hear the word wolf.

It is difficult to convey in print the sense of enthusiasm and excitement that Joanna conveyed as she explored details of the text. She gave the impression of having thought considerably about the book before she arrived for the second interview and to be happy to continue to think and talk about it. There was a sense of new discoveries as she paged through the book and stopped at different incidents to discuss them.

> The wolfcutter. Goldie was the wolfcutter, right? . . that, that comes in and, yeah. Ha! That, that's just it! How she, she didn't think of, she thought Goldie was just feeble-minded and she couldn't do anything on her own, yet she convinced the police to come and she convinced Lyall and Robert that there really was something wrong, and yet she had the, she had the plastic explosives, so possibly, no, but she didn't care about her relationship with Mick any more, she was going, she was going to save Cassy and Nan--well, Cassy!

Joanna was explicit that she enjoyed the chance to work out some of her ideas in conversation.

> *Joanna*: See, I sort of need to, you just need to push me a bit, just so I can figure--
>
> *Margaret*: I can see that.
>
> *Joanna*: Because I can't, I can't find them on my own. But I really enjoyed the book.
>
> *Margaret*: It's quite complicated, isn't it, there's an awful lot going on.
>
> *Joanna*: It is, it's hard reading, you know, there's, there's reading that you don't even have, you can think of something else and read it but just (inaudible). This is hard reading, you really have to, your mind has to be 100% on it. But I, I enjoyed it very much. Did, is this, does she write any other?

Joanna's enthusiasm was contagious; we talked about other books she might enjoy and then returned to the topic of *Wolf*, tracing ideas through the book, reading passages to each other to demonstrate how patterns repeated themselves. At one level, the transcript of this section of our talk is not very interesting because it involves mainly conversation about finding the right page and then extensive quoting from the book. At another level, however, the transcript is fascinating because it shows this girl, whose main reading these days is short stories from popular magazines, behaving like a very literary reader, checking references, looking for evidence to support her interpretation--and pausing regularly to make an admiring comment on the construction of the book as a whole. A small sample will perhaps give some idea; it is clear from this exchange that I was the reader more familiar with the book but Joanna is matching me step for step.

> *Margaret*: What I wondered when I read [the mirror room passage] was if the mirrors didn't involve some kind of entry into the world of the fragments of the, of the fairy tales, because the mirrors are all little bits of mirror.
>
> *Joanna*: And they're all different types.
>
> *Margaret*: All different colours and types. And, if you look, if you look closely, it really is the magic forest.
>
> *Joanna*: Yeah, she says, the, there was no, there was nothing left of the magic forest.
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah, that's right. But when she first goes in, it talks about it. It was like walking into an infinite forest full of fireflies, that's page 14.
>
> *Joanna*: The room had no limits?
>
> *Margaret*: Above that. Very near the top.
>
> *Joanna*: Right. The darkness flickering with points of flame that swelled all around--yeah. Dark flowers and flashes of colour.

> *Margaret*: You see, it's after *that* that she started to dream.
>
> *Joanna*: Yeah!
>
> *Margaret*: So it seemed to me this is the threshold where she stepped into the magic world, where the dreams and the fairy tales--
>
> *Joanna*: Yeah, and after that, he, Lyall says, Hello Little Red Riding Hood!
>
> *Margaret*: That's right.
>
> *Joanna*: Brilliant!
>
> *Margaret*: It's pretty smart.
>
> *Joanna*: Yeah, every time I, I read a book where it involves, where the author has taken such care and, and piecing everything together.
>
> *Margaret*: Right.

I had nothing like this kind of conversation with any other reader with the possible exception of Daniel, the Ph.D. pilot study student. Joanna was the eighth student I met, out of the ten, so the discussion did not arise out of the first flush of my own enthusiasm. It was her excitement about the book and about her own ability to make discoveries in the book that kept us talking. And the more we talked, the more excited she became. At one point, after we disentangled a particularly knotty puzzle, she simply sighed and said weakly, "Oh wow!"

The excitement of the perfect match

In this research project, Joanna was pure bonus. I might have found a hundred readers, none of whom felt the kind of passion for this book which she described. To have one out of just ten readers both feeling and able to demonstrate an excitement which sharpened and focused her ability to observe and to analyze was a piece of great good fortune, heightened by the fact of Joanna's largely unexceptional reading background.

There is probably little point in trying to pin down what made the girl and the book such a successful match. It is tempting to assume that Joanna's knowledge of and affection for Romanian fairy tales must have played a part; it is difficult to imagine a better grounding for reading a book based on stories of wolves and werewolves. It is interesting to note that she said herself that she likes to use her brain as she reads, suggesting that the intricacies of the text would appeal to her and challenge her. It is possible that the moment in the first reading of the second dream, when she began to see how the text was going to work, was crucial in alerting her attention early enough that she could apply this new understanding as she read the rest of the book. It is more than probable that her feeling of success over that insight led to a more positive attitude to the rest of the reading. However, when all of these factors have been taken into consideration, there is still a huge area of unaccountability. What is clear is that Joanna's great enthusiasm for the book was part of a reading which fuelled some very sophisticated insight.

Joanna gave a vivid description of how she read *Wolf*.

> I read it in, in one night, and about half an hour the next morning. Because once I started, if I like it, I'll just go on and on and on until my eyes just close and I can't read any more.

There is no question about the importance of momentum in this kind of reading, but it does not seem to have been achieved at the expense of accuracy, nor does it seem to have reduced Joanna's attention to details of composition. She noticed very fine-grained comparisons and parallels--certainly more than I would pick up on such a rush through a text, but I am a re-reader and am often content to let the finer points wait for a second reading. Joanna was explicit that she would not want to read even *Wolf* again (unless she had to write a report on it), though she did ask for a list of other books by Gillian Cross and was interested to hear about other books based on fairy tales.

Literary appreciation--detached and engaged and developing

In Joanna's encounter with *Wolf*, we can see a reader developing.

One of the Canadian banks ran a series of advertisements proclaiming, "We got to be Canada's biggest bank, one customer at a time." This slogan can be productively transferred into a consideration of reading; in many real and important ways, people get to become readers one book at a time. In this study, I was not looking at readers in some amorphous way; I was looking, precisely and specifically, at readers of *Wolf*.

Joanna, as a reader of *Wolf*, shows us many facets of development. At the first and most basic level, perhaps, we can see the dynamism of the moment when the real reader suddenly grasps how the implied reader should be behaving.

> And perhaps--oh, I get this! The Little Red Riding Hood. (laughs) How the Little Red, how Lyall called her Little Red Riding Hood. Maybe the wolf's enticing her to, to come with him, he'll show her the way. Yeah! Oh my God! Here, it's right here! *Familiar but unrecognized*.

The last phrase comes from the book but it describes the role of the dreams in her reading so far. At this moment, she makes the transition: now the dreams are familiar *and* recognized.

There are many ways to describe this moment in the terms we have already explored. Joanna is clearly at a point of concept activation. Her repertoire includes a complete enough version of Little Red Riding Hood that she is able to imagine with the kind of guided spontaneity which Kendall Walton has described; the parallels do not fall into place with complete automaticity because the text is anything but transparent at this point, but the repertoire supplies what she needs quickly and effortlessly, once she has registered that it is required.

Yet the metonymy which conveys Red Riding Hood by means of her basket, the synecdoche which represents the wolf by his voice, is a deliberate and artful use of effects which draws attention to the words themselves, and what they reveal and conceal, as well as evoking the image of Red Riding Hood with all her conflicting associations. Joanna is not just reading any old book about Little Red Riding Hood; she is reading *Wolf* which is not exactly *about* Little Red Riding Hood at all. She registers this in some of her further response to that second dream:

> It's, it's pretty--I just got it right now. (laughs) Yup. Oh, oh! . . . It's sort of reading between the lines. Okay. Anything else?

So Joanna is developing in the terms which *Wolf* calls for, realizing that she cannot read in a completely unself-conscious, plot-devouring way, moving in a single leap to a position far closer to that demanded by the text.

At the same time, in much of what she says about the book, especially when compared to the readings of the other two text-oriented readers, Debbie and Denise, we have a useful starting-point for a discussion of some of the terms of development in the more general sense of that word.

Looking at the models

Jack Thomson (1987) and Robert Protherough (1983) have both produced developmental models of response to literature which supply an interesting framework for discussing the reading of Debbie, Denise and Joanna. These models are not identical but have many points in common.

Thomson establishes six categories: 1. unreflective interest in action; 2. empathising; 3. analogising; 4. reflecting on the significance of events (theme) and behaviour (distanced evaluation of characters); 5. reviewing the whole work as the author's creation; and 6. consciously considered relationship with the author, recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self (identity theme) and of one's own reading processes.

Protherough describes five categories: 1. projection into a character; 2. projection into the situation; 3. associating between book and reader; 4. the distanced viewer; and 5. detached evaluation.

Thomson's points 1 and 2 appear to be reversed in Protherough's list, and Thomson's point 6 does not really seem to have a counterpoint in Protherough; otherwise the overlap is substantial. I have no trouble in inserting Debbie and Denise at level 5 in each taxonomy. Where I do have trouble is in finding a place for Joanna.

Obviously, as both Thomson and Protherough insist, no one reads at one level and one level only, and they both assume that one mark of sophistication as a reader is the ability to move between modes of reading as wished or required. Joanna was clearly operating at many levels as she read *Wolf*. However, what she achieved and what these developmental grids do not seem to make room for, was an analytical approach which did not rely on distance and detachment, but which rather was motivated by a very strong sense of engagement. Joanna drew great pleasure from her awareness of the intricate constructedness of the text but at the same time she was immersed in the story as well. To put it another way, she appeared to be able to look *through* the text as if it were transparent and to look *at* it as if it were opaque, and to shift back and forth between these two perspectives without any sense of difficulty or artificiality.

I would argue that Joanna's analysis was heightened by attachment rather than detachment and that this is one factor which made her account of the book more satisfying than those offered by Debbie and Denise. I do not want to reach a negative judgement on the readings of Debbie and Denise; both provided intelligent, thoughtful accounts of their readings of the book, and, with books as with people, you cannot legislate for that extra personal excitement that makes for love affairs or strong friendships.

Nevertheless, just because it is unpredictable, unenforceable and unreliable, we should not ignore the importance of the *undetached*, *undistanced* kind of evaluation that explores the workings of the text out of a high level of engagement. Certainly I would claim that the greatest reading experiences of my life involved just that combination of enjoying the world created by the text and enjoying the artistry of the creation. Maybe, later, I might move to Thomson's level 6, where I might consciously consider my relationship with the author, or explore the text's ideology; but I suspect that I might be more likely to avoid such a relatively clinical approach to a text I particularly enjoyed.

There is no telling when such a reading experience may come along. I recall one such moment when I was sitting in an English 100 class, aged 17, bored and irritable, and browsing through my anthology to distract me from a tedious lecture. What I found was "Dulce et decorum est" by Wilfred Owen, a poet I had never heard of. What I brought to this encounter instead of knowledge of the poet was a long personal history of being steeped in World War I nostalgia and faded patriotism; Newfoundland made a very great sacrifice in the First World War and, even in the 1960s, students were immersed in "In Flanders Fields" and "If I should die, think only this of me." From my private reading, I could contribute the sentimentalities of L.M. Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside* to this brew of intertextual unanimity, and I had just finished a year of European history taught by a man still bitter about the bunglings which killed so many people in 1914 - 1918. I had enough Latin to read the title and the searing conclusion; and, as I read this poem, I could feel my horizons move and enlarge. My first response was to the enormous truth which the poem represented, which had always been hidden from me. Later, though still voluntarily, I looked harder and noticed how the grammar of the poem feeds the sense: the endless list of present participles contributes to a kind of paralysis and a feeling of never getting to the end of a nightmare as the soldiers struggle through the gas attack. At no point, then or later, did I move to a position of detached evaluation; nor do I really want to do so even now. If anything, my efforts would be in the opposite direction; I would want to preserve at least some shadow of the electricity which passed through me on that first encounter.

I include this small item of personal history because I possess, and can perhaps convey, an awareness of the interiority of that reading. Joanna's encounter with *Wolf* appears to contain many similar features: the repertoire of vital references instantly and effortlessly available so that no attention is distracted by the struggle for recall; the sense of recognition slashed through with a simultaneous feeling of surprise; the emotive response heightened and expanded by an awareness of a constructive art at work; the delight in returning to the work in full confidence that a more vigorous exploration will lead to further pleasure.

Compared to this excitement, both Thomson and Protherough's renditions of reading, in some ways, seem hollow. Thomson includes a proviso at the head of his chart that the requirements for satisfaction at all stages are enjoyment and elementary understanding. Protherough suggests that detached evaluation comes after the reading rather than during. Neither of them, however, seems to me to be describing the kind of enjoyment which, during our discussion, drove Joanna back to the text over and over again, looking for details and structures to reinforce her pleasure.

Joanna's *after*-reading thoughts and words served her to prolong the pleasure she had experienced *during* the reading. To return to Jeanette Winterson's metaphor of the "rooms behind," she seemed to want to move back into the text to find rooms she might have passed by. She was not looking for plot details she might have missed except to see how they could contribute to the overall pattern of the book. She was responding to the work as a construct but there was a sense of joyful engagement, of commitment, which does not appear to be listed in these taxonomies.

Thomson has expanded his labels of the different levels in his model by a set of phrases. Level 5, reviewing the whole work as the author's creation, includes the following elements:

> (i) Drawing on literary and cultural repertoires
> (j) Interrogating the text to match the author's representation with one's own
> (k) Recognition of implied author (1987, 360 - 361)

All of these activities can be done with an intensity of interest which ranges from weak and passive to strong and active, and with a degree of sophistication of response which moves from simple and rudimentary to developed and subtle. Joanna clearly belongs on the upper end of both of these ranges. And yet the description does not adequately cover her response.

I am not rejecting either taxonomy, simply suggesting that detailed access to an extended reading allows us to expand the upper end of engagement, commitment and excitement. Joanna's response to *Wolf*, even compared to Debbie's intelligent analysis, makes me wonder if we do not sometimes overstate the virtues of detachment.

Limits and achievements

I think Joanna's reaction to *Wolf* also enables us to question whether we are underestimating what adolescents can achieve. J.A. Appleyard has produced a book, *Becoming a Reader*, which looks not just at specific age-ranges but at what reading means throughout a lifetime. He suggests there are limits to what an adolescent can achieve with a book.

> The notion that literary meaning is something "hidden" in the text can be seen as an extension of the adolescent's new-found awareness that there is a

> disparity between the inside and the outside of experience. If this is true of oneself, why should it not be true of others and of things like texts insofar as they embody an author's point of view? This discovery marks a fundamental aspect of literary apprehension. . . .
>
> The discovery of multiple levels of significance deriving from authorial intention is perhaps the limit of an adolescent's ability to deal with the idea of meaning in a story. It is an extension, to the story as a whole, of the metaphoric or figurative principle that sees one thing simultaneously as another. But the adolescent version of this principle still wants this meaning to be a set of objective and decipherable facts. To go further would require taking the point of view that meaning results from an act of interpretation by the reader, which is the issue faced in the next stage of development. Adolescents interpret, but they do not have a theory of interpretation. They debate about interpretations, but the point at issue is which one is the right one. (1990, 112 - 113)

Appleyard has many subtle and provocative insights to offer about reading development, but I am not entirely sure that, in this account of adolescent reading, he pays sufficient attention to the role of a specific text. *Wolf* describes and embodies aspects of pluralism and fragmentation which Joanna, perhaps in a rudimentary way, acknowledged and identified. The possibility of a single interpretation is not the most important issue in a text such as *Wolf*. It is an example of a new kind of book: aimed at teenagers (for all its complexity, no one could ever argue that *Wolf* is an adult novel) but literary, self-conscious, metafictive. Such a book, read by someone who enjoys and attends to the play with conventions and references which it embodies, might well lead readers to more analytical reflections which are still rooted in the specifics of the particular text.

Jack Thomson's large surveys of teenaged readers were done in 1978 and 1984. Robert Protherough's book was published in 1983 and the material was collected over a number of years before that date. Even in the ten years since 1984, there have been several substantial publishing initiatives directed at adolescent readers. (For example, in 1986 the Book Marketing Council in the United Kingdom commissioned a major survey of adolescent readers and set up a co-ordinated promotion aimed at teenagers; see Pountney (1986) for some details.) No amount of marketing can create good writers and wonderful books; what it can do is create a climate where good writers are led to consider the possibility of writing for adolescents. Whatever the cause, the number of highly sophisticated novels written to be accessible to teenagers has grown enormously; there have actually been complaints because so many recent Carnegie Medal awards (including, of course, the one for *Wolf*) have been given to novels for adolescents, although the Medal was instituted to acknowledge children's literature. (See Hardyment, 1994, 26, Barker, 1994, 15)

What Cross offers in *Wolf* is what many other writers for adolescents are currently offering: subject matter and plot construction which appeal to teenagers, and which can support them as they learn to cope with a sophistication of writing technique which was once confined to more adult books. Given such support, it would not be surprising if adolescents surpassed what might once have been expected of them. I would argue that with Joanna, and with some of the other readers in this study, this is exactly what we see happening.

Wolf is an example of a book which offers many points of entry and of reading. It is possible to ignore the complexities of the intertextual references and to read the book straight through on a level of plot. This would be a diminished reading but it might not feel like that to readers who did not register what they were missing. Effectively the book supplies a kind of continuum of potential reading experience.

And what this allows for is what we see some of the readers achieving, notably Joanna, Debbie and Keith. Starting with a functioning repertoire of reading strategies, they begin the book at one level, applying what they already know about reading and about life to the task of comprehending the story. It is in the *practice* of reading the book that they develop new ideas of convention and process. Just like the beginning readers, they are learning by doing. Their understandings of the ways of the book are performative.

Such understandings are therefore specific and embedded, affected by their emotional reaction to the story. One substantial pedagogical question relates to the issue of disembedding these new understandings and making them general.

Appleyard suggests that there are limits to how far adolescents will go with generalization.

> But even readers who have arrived at the notion that a story may have layers of meaning are only partway along the road to an adequate resolution of the problems posed by inquiring about the meaning of a text. The concept of the author's intention, for instance, also implies that a story has a design, which in turn implies that its meaning is a function of its design, which can be analyzed in a evidentiary way, and ultimately that this is part of the process of reading (which by now means studying) the book. The adolescent reader is entering the foothills of this whole new range of thought. For now it is fun just to be here, thinking about the characters and about one's own life as it is mirrored in the story. Perhaps it is possible to sum up a meaning and to defend it by point to what characters say and do in the story. To get beyond this into techniques of analysis and the categories of literary criticism is something the best students may get a glimpse of and some may appear to be good at because they are clever at imitating the language of their teachers, but it finally requires a new way of looking at a story--as a problem of textual interpretation--that is substantially different from the adolescent's impulse to think about a story, even about what it means. (1990, 113)

The kind of analysis which Appleyard describes here would seem to be a close relation to Thomson's level 6, "Consciously considered relationship with the author, recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self (identity theme) and of one's own reading processes." (360) And this might be linked to Mellor *et al.* (1991) and their checklist of textual and ideological questions which the reader ought to bring to bear on the text.
There are profound pedagogical questions which need to be addressed here. What does a text gain and lose when the emphasis in reading shifts from the performative to the analytical? What happens to readers as they move out of Appleyard's foothills, as they take on the assumption that reading "by now means studying"? What happens as more of the conventions and processes for reading become a matter of instruction rather than organic development?

I earlier quoted the enthusiasm of the pilot study student, Susan, as she registered the impact of the Red Riding Hood motif. Because in the pilot study there was no opportunity to interview individual readers, I asked them to write a brief account of themselves as readers. Susan's self-description is a very sobering one for any English teacher to consider.

> I am not a "good" reader. By "good" I mean efficient. As I read I constantly assess, make notes . . . analyze and this, I feel, is the result of the conditioning that occurs as one takes his/her English degree. In my opinion, I do not make the connections between imagery, allusion etc. that good literature presents as quickly and/or easily as the average reader. Further, I am afraid that I will not be able to enjoy reading as much as I might have for all the dissecting I have done. I am not even sure that I would be able to read in a relaxed sense, now.
>
> As an English graduate I feel what I have learned about the analytical reading process very useful. However, as I have just written, there have been effects that may diminish any benefit significantly. Currently I am quite disillusioned with school as a whole so assess the following accordingly. I began the "reading process" of the English program fascinated by what I was taught about the complexity of literature and intrigued to discover more. Now I am just tired.

It is also possible to observe some incipient fatigue in Ed's comment as he was asked to react to the book as a whole.

> I've, I've spent too much time in English, I'd be, I end up analyzing everything I read, deconstructing in a sense, talking, you know. I don't see the relevance here and I, I haven't done that, so--I thought the book was good, I didn't think it was, you know, wonderful. Um, I found that, um, really I connected with some characters.

Feeling free not to engage in "deconstruction," Ed's preference was to return to the issue of which characters he had connected with. How to get him to consider questions of text, of ideology, of his own responses as a reader, without imposing an analytical framework that comes across as sterile and which threatens to diminish the pleasure of reading to the point of no return (a point reached by very many adolescents; this is not an empty threat) is one of the key issues which confronts any teacher of literature.

I would argue that Joanna's reaction was preferable to Ed's; she expanded her ideas of reading without losing her sense of engagement and excitement. However, to rely on such an engagement to enlighten a reader's prowess is to lean very heavily on what is ultimately fortuitous. There is a serious question here, one to which I will return later.

Chapter 9

"OBVIOUSLY THEY HAVE SOME SIGNIFICANCE ": WORDS AND PHRASES

So far, I have talked about the readings in terms of the readers. Now, I want to look at the readings from the perspective of the text. What patterns are there among the ten readings? How do these patterns relate to Gillian Cross's words?

If we see an eddy or a whirlpool in a stream, we assume there are rocks under the surface shaping the flow of the water. The words of a text are not so determinate, perhaps; the reader always has the option of rejecting the obvious reading. Perhaps a more useful metaphor for the patterning of the different readings is provided by the dance. It is not a comparison that will bear a limitless load, but it has its suggestive uses. And one aspect of this parallel was expressed, in a very different context, by Brian Mulroney's pithy comment, "Ya dance with the one what brung ya."

When we look at the ten readers, both separately and collectively, we have no doubt that they are all dancing with the same text. They move towards it, swirl away into a personal association, move back again. But their connection with the text is never in doubt. Furthermore, this connection is expressed in the responses to quite small elements of the text as well as to the overall story. There are points in the text where the readers were virtually unanimous in paying attention, although their individual reactions to the details might vary. I have chosen five such moments in the hope of adding to our insight into the reading process.

I chose my five topics as ones that stood out, not only among the ten readers who participated in the full study but also among the 23 readers of the pilot study. Some of these textual points may seem extremely small; yet the pattern of response shows that something is happening in the text. Although they choose to have different attitudes and opinions over some of the points at issue, the readers were agreed that certain moments in the text were important.

The winter aconites: inference, automaticity and cohesion

None of the ten readers was completely clear either about what an aconite actually is or about the symbolic and thematic role of the aconites in the story. At a very basic level of word processing, the phrase supplied a clear case of interruption in automaticity. Even pronouncing the word caused problems for several readers (although this became a problem for them only because they had to speak about the book).

Apart from anything else, this stumbling-block suggests that the readers were reading in quite a linear way, because Gillian Cross actually provides a great deal of information about the aconites, *before* she gives them a label. Even on the second reading, however, the readers appeared to take in little of her description except the general idea that an aconite is a flower. Where they quote the text, they refer to one of the lines which *follows* the phrase, "winter aconite."

This is what Cross has to say, in the first dream.

> The clearing was like a shout, raucous and shocking. Bright blue sky. Bright green grass. And a patch of bright, bright yellow at the far edge. With the basket dragging at her arm, she began to push her way towards it, through the sharp branches.
>
> The flowers sat close to the ground in their ruffs of frilled green leaves. Against the darkness of the pine trees, their yellow cups were as sharp as a challenge.
>
> Winter aconites.
>
> She stared at them, knowing--in her dream--that they had some other name. Some meaning that she needed to understand. But the word slid away like soap as she tried to grasp it and she could not remember.
>
> She began to pick the flowers. . . (18 - 19)

In some cases, the readers were content simply to register a problem, to establish the unfamiliarity of the word and to substitute the idea of flowers instead.

> *Brenda*: They didn't actually make sense cause . . . they talked about the winter aco- aconies or whatever?
>
> *Margaret*: Aconite.
>
> *Brenda*: Aconite. Well, the flowers, and they didn't fit to the story at all. Flowers, like, it didn't, it was just sort of there but it didn't go into the rest of the story. [second reading]

* * *

> *Christine*: I was wondering why Cassy didn't want to hear some more about the winter aconite or whatever it's called. [first reading]

* * *

> *Greg*: I never really understood what an aconite was. I was going to look it up but I forgot. [second reading]

These remarks seem to be very clear examples of a form of low-level inferencing. Some of the other readers made similar stabs at making a generic substitute, but they made higher level inferences as well, allowing the apparent importance of the flowers to provide a focus for their reading.

> *Ed*: I'm not sure what winter aconites are, I've never seen those flowers. . . . I'm not sure why she began to pick the flowers, you know, obviously they have some significance but I have no idea right now. It's fairly suspenseful. [first reading]

* * *

> *Candace*: Then they're talking about the yellow flowers of aconite and everything, and it seems to me like this is coming into her mind from someone else far away who's seeing these things and I thought of another book that I've read but I don't remember what the book was. I felt helpless. [first

> reading]
>
> *Candace*: Then the flowers, she, she noticed they had some other name but she couldn't grasp it, and that--I don't know. Anyway, like, I made the connection between the, the flowers and how they keep reappearing in the book. [second reading]

* * *

> *Keith*: Um, again, the dream with the, the aconite all over the place again, it's definitely a premonition that's leading up to having something to do with Moongazer, but what, where's it going? Why, and so on and so forth? I would like to know where that all ties in. [first reading]
>
> *Keith*: You know, you don't really know what, what meaning [the flowers] have at all until it comes up with the topic of wolves, and wolves tends to lead to her father but she's not really aware of that. [second reading]

* * *

> *Debbie*: Um, let's see, again there's this reference to winter aconites back from Chapter 2. Um, apparently it's probably going to be very significant. I expect to see more of it. [first reading]

* * *

> *Joanna*: And this dream. She must be in a forest and (pause) going to pick flowers. I don't really understand dreams but I'm just trying to think what the flowers could symbolize. [first reading]

In these comments, we can almost hear the click as the readers change gear. Bottom-up processing isn't working; the word aconite has very little meaning to the readers. At the same time, they infer that it has some serious, although apparently obscure, meaning for Cassy and they move to a kind of top-down strategy to make a place for the puzzling word, along the lines of, "I don't know what it means but it is going to be important in the story and link to other parts of the book, so I will at least establish a place for it in my scheme of the book."

It is apparent that the readers seem quite prepared to substitute a kind of vague awareness of symbolic importance for a detailed definition of a winter aconite. Debbie was the only one who attempted to extrapolate from the symbolic role of the aconite, which was clear to her, to make a guess at a specific definition.

> *Debbie*: I think that the aconite is, um, really, really represents [the semtex] by it, or, or the, this yellow is represented by the aconite in her, um, in her dreams. Um, from what I, I think aconite is some kind of dangerous kind of root, I, I think. I'm kind of speculating here but--um, so you can see the parallel to this dream and Cassy's real life, um, with her father. [second reading]

Her hypothesis is reasonable, even ingenious, but, when it is held up against the other comments, the contrast is striking. The vagueness of the other readers immediately becomes more visible.

I want to propose a hypothesis of my own at this point. It seems possible that the very vagueness of these readers' descriptions of the symbolic importance of the aconite allows them to deal with their lack of understanding of the specific flower. They need not interrupt their reading to go to the dictionary because they can account for the aconite in the text: it plays a symbolic, thematic role whose importance will be revealed later. The broader inferences they can make about the aconite as motif almost appear to absolve them from dealing with the aconite as detail. Normal automaticity is quickly resumed.

An inference obviously cannot be made as automatically as word recognition. Nevertheless, these readers seem to have little trouble in making room for the idea that the aconite will recur, perhaps in a more explanatory context. Their momentum is halted briefly, but they do not linger, even in the context of articulating their responses and problems aloud.

Substituting inference for recognition is a subtle skill and one which receives little attention in the research literature. It is certainly something which may be passed over or mis-measured in a comprehension exercise. There are those who would decry it as a sloppy tactic, but I did not get the impression that these readers were trying to evade the issue of the unfamiliar word. Only Keith and Joanna were brave enough to use the only resource at their immediate disposal and ask me what the word meant. Greg thought about looking it up but (as is usual with such thoughts) did nothing about it. But the readers did not skip or ignore what they did not immediately understand; they resourcefully found a more capacious slot in the grand scheme of the text and acknowledged the role of the image even as they admitted they could not visualize it.

The importance of bottom-up and top-down processing has long been emphasized in theory. Here, in practice, we see an example of how they may function differentially, the one substituting where the other temporarily fails. The switch seems to be achieved with little effort or conscious attention; the comments of the different readers are remarkably similar.

This technique for dealing with uncertainty works with subtlety. You have to be alert to the way a text is likely to operate to be able to assess how a word is working even if you don't know what it means. Certainly, as a way of refining the balance between momentum and accuracy, it is masterly: readers seem to assume that momentum (finding out where the image may lead) may actually lead to greater (though maybe not complete) accuracy in the long run.

One consequence of this kind of treatment of an unfamiliar word is that the aconite was able to retain its important role as an element of cohesion in the text. In the early chapters, it is really the major link between the dreams and the main story, and these readers were aware of its strategic importance even though their understanding of its specific meaning was shadowy.

For this strategy to work, however, it must proceed reasonably smoothly; maybe not automatically, but the substitution of a question mark for a proper understanding must not divert too much attention. Brenda provided an example of what may happen when the reader is distracted by an effort after understanding. She was quite explicit that she could not provide a "slot" for the aconite. This appears to have decoyed her attention away from the Red Riding Hood theme. As we talked about the book after her second reading, it took very little prodding to get her to recognize the fairy tale at work.

> *Margaret*: Just have a look at the one on page 82, see where she gets to in this dream when she finally comes out of the forest and see if that reminds you of anything.
>
> *Brenda*: Ohh, Little Red Riding Hood!
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah, just have a quick look through and look at them, see how, see how many--
>
> *Brenda*: They all go together now. Okay, I see. I didn't know what those flowers were, that's why I didn't--

Brenda was not successful either in solving or in ignoring the problem of the aconite, and, as a result, missed an important aspect of the book that she clearly might have recognized if her full attention had been free. Her example is interesting in the contrast it provides; most of the readers found a way to deal with the aconites which did not use too much attention. The ability not to waste attention on insoluble problems is an important contribution both to momentum and to the economical use of the energies and information available at the time.

A "good enough" reading of the aconite reference can be achieved in a number of ways, and I am not recommending them as equally desirable for an ideal reading. You can look up the word (only, as Greg's example typifies, we rarely do, and the consequences to momentum are drastic); you can make do with not knowing and hope it will become clear later on, meanwhile using some kind of shadowy stand-in for purposes of cohesion and recognition; you can fret and be distracted every time the word re-appears; you can solve the problem as quickly as possible by asking the nearest likely person. In terms of remaining "inside" the story, the last alternative is possibly the most efficient, and it is one which most readers use where possible.

What is probably not "good enough" is to ignore the aconites and hope they are unimportant, without reserving some fall-back strategy in case their importance becomes more evident later on. It is striking that none of the ten readers behaved in this way. They knew the aconites had a place of significance in the text, and they registered the significance even if their understanding of the specifics was hazy. In this respect, they all provided a reading that, at the very least, was good enough.

The childishness of Goldie: inference, affect and ideology

Ten readers, given two sessions each, had twenty opportunities to comment on Cross's portrayal of Goldie. It is surely more than coincidence that they used nineteen of these occasions to make some kind of observation on Goldie's childishness, fecklessness or weirdness. Only Debbie, the least emotional of all the readers, spoke only once about Goldie rather than twice. Even Keith, in his highly truncated comments on the second reading, raised the question of Goldie's behaviour for the second time.

What seems to have struck the readers particularly was the need for the children to act as the grown-ups because the grown-ups were acting like kids. This theme arose over and over again, in remarkably similar words.

> *Brenda*: Goldie was kind of strange because she was like a kid trapped in an adult's body because the way she acted she was, like, immature sometimes. Sometimes she was responsible and other times she was just plain weird. [second reading]

* * *

> *Hami*: You know, [Goldie]'s, like, saying it's a big idea and Casey's wondering what the idea's all about and everything and, you know, it kind of makes you wonder yourself what kind of idea it is and, you know, if she's so, like, for a mother, she's like dancing and everything, like, what's gotten into her, what's this big idea all about? [first reading]

> *Hami*: They described that Lyall and, um, Goldie were, you know, playing with each other, kind of, and it's kind of hard to believe, like, um, adults like them, but, um, Casey knew in her mind that, you know, Goldie was that kind of person but she couldn't imagine Lyall like that. [second reading]

* * *

> *Christine*: When they're making the, the masks, when they were fighting, it, I think it sounded like, um, Cassy's Mum Goldie was just like a little kid, and they were real adults. Just like me and my sisters were fighting. [first reading]

* * *

> *Greg*: Um, I kind of wonder about Goldie, like, what kind of person she is, like, is she sort of, does she have, like, mental problems or something? She's lazy. [first reading]

> *Greg*: Kind of makes Goldie look like some sort of hyper-adult who acts more like a child. [second reading]

* * *

> *Candace*: It says, it was like talking to a nagging child and that reminded me of my cousins because I look after them a lot and that's exactly what they sounded like and I, I started to get really impatient with Goldie. Um, and then she says, Oh all right, hang on a minute, and this is like she's the older one and Goldie's, Goldie's a little child. [first reading]

> *Candace*: Again and again, I keep feeling frustrated with, with these people because they're supposed to be the commanding ones, you know, adults are

supposed to be in charge there. [first reading]

* * *

> *Keith*: Why is Goldie so good at turning off her brain? Obviously Cassy and Nan aren't the only ones that feel Goldie's kind of on the lacking end of intelligence. . . . [Robert] seems to be a lot calmer than the other, other two. Lyall strikes me as he could be the same kind of person as, as Goldie because they seem to both, both be adults, Lyall older than Goldie, but they both behave like a pair of children which says to me that they could be the same type of person. Mind you, he seems to have achieved something. [first reading]

> *Keith*: Cassy showed quite amazement that Goldie did any work, so why is it that Goldie doesn't do much work? [second reading]

* * *

> *Debbie*: Um, as I read on, Robert seemed, um, if I can call it sensible, he seemed to bring Goldie and Lyall on track almost, it seemed. [first reading]

* * *

> *Denise*: Lyall and Goldie just started goofing around and they were acting like children and Cassy wasn't very impressed. Um, she just thought that they should act a lot older than they were and not all this nonsense. [first reading]

> *Denise*: She wasn't impressed with the way they were acting, grown-ups, especially when she's the one that has to be the mature one. [first reading]

* * *

> *Joanna*: Goldie's not really her own person and she doesn't think for herself, doesn't do anything for herself. [first reading]

As majority votes go, this one is fairly overwhelming. Some readers even supported their inferences with references to the punctuation of Cassy's postcard.

> *Candace*: Then it says, she's working, on page 28, there's little exclamation marks like it, like it would be surprising to find her working. [first reading]

> *Ed*: She obviously has a very low opinion of Goldie; She's working, double exclamation point. [first reading]

Every reader, without exception, picked up that Cross describes Goldie as childlike. Twenty of the twenty-three readers in the pilot study also made some remark about this issue. A number of interesting questions arise from this virtual unanimity.

The first point, of course, is that the text makes it fairly hard to miss that Goldie is being portrayed as less mature than her daughter. Some readers did register that this information is being received by way of Cassy's perspective on events and adjusted their own views accordingly. One or two even registered that Cassy's views were filtered through those of her grandmother and distanced themselves even further from the description. One reader, Ed, rejected the description outright, and several others altered their opinions on the second reading.

I will return to some of these subtler views later on. For the moment, however, I want to look at the fact that all the readers stressed in one way or another that Goldie's behaviour was marked, not usual, not to be taken for granted.

An irresponsible mother, more childish than her child, is an image which carries a heavy affective load, perhaps particularly for adolescent readers (though the response of the older pilot study students suggests it is not a neutral image for them either). The dismay creeps into their phrases: "for a mother, she's like dancing and everything;" "Goldie was just like a little kid, and they were real adults;" "again and again I keep feeling frustrated with, with these people because they're supposed to be the commanding ones, you know, adults are supposed to be in charge there."

These remarks all come from junior high readers, who may feel more vulnerable about the idea of a child looking after a mother. I suggest, however, that even the simplest expression of concern can also be read ideologically; that the question of an irresponsible parent, a mother especially, carries a cultural and political charge as well as an emotional one. The transcripts do not provide enough information to disentangle these entwined themes, and I suspect a complete analysis of which elements predominate in any one reader's response would be impossible anyway. It would be interesting to find out if more neutral responses might be obtained from readers in a culture where extended families are the norm, and where mothers often do not care for their own children.

Be that as it may, it is interesting to observe that the question of a feckless mother was sufficiently charged for everyone to take note. There was less unanimity in how this observation was turned or developed over the course of a reading.

Ed was the reader who most clearly defied Cassy's interpretation of Goldie's behaviour. Over and over again, he refuted her analysis.

> *Ed*: Goldie seemed very exuberant, very, um, I don't think, I think Cassy, um, acts very conservatively. She, Goldie seems like a very warm person and I don't, I wasn't quite, I didn't understand why Cassy, um, had this negative attitude towards her except that she is lazy. [first reading]
>
> *Ed*: Cassy seemed to get more annoying as the chapter went on. She said, *Playacting, she ought to have guessed that Goldie wouldn't be doing real work.* Um, um, I think, I thought that was extremely unfair to Goldie which, when Cassy knew virtually nothing about what they were doing. She also seemed, she also annoyed me with her, when Goldie and Lyall were playing. She seemed, she also annoyed me there, she seems to think people should only work, you know. She's very, Cassy's very condescending towards Goldie, I found. [first reading]

Ed actively disagreed with Cassy's initial premises, which made it relatively straightforward for him to reject her analysis.

> *Ed*: I never really thought about it but, since I'm interested in going into acting, I was really mad at Cassy's, *Playacting, she ought to have guessed that Goldie wouldn't be doing real work.* I, I think playacting is probably one of the best ways to teach kids. I don't think it's easy to connect with them. [second reading]

Other readers started off by joining in the chorus of disapproval over Goldie, but mellowed their attitudes as they read further. Candace, for example, began by declaring great dislike for Goldie, commenting on her uncaring and irresponsible ways. She took Cassy's assessment of the acting work at face value.

> *Candace*: She ought to have guessed that Goldie wouldn't be doing real work and I felt, I felt sort of glad to know that she still wasn't doing anything, so that I could still dislike her. [first reading]

However, as she read on, Candace began to give Goldie the benefit of the doubt. At the start of her second reading, she was still declaring that she felt anger and disgust over Goldie's ways, but she softened her views as she read through Chapter 2.

> *Candace*: I remember feeling a little bit sorry for Goldie because, because she didn't really seem to have any life. And then, okay, then on 15, *Oh, Cassy, how lovely, I wanted you to come.* She seems so, um, unknowing and childlike, and I felt, um, mad that she didn't know, but then, thinking about the end of the book it sort of seemed to connect with something. [second reading]

Candace remarked more than once on how much Goldie changed by the end of the book, and also how Cassy's attitude towards Goldie altered as well. In her second reading of Chapter 4, she comments on the same sentence as in her first reading, but puts a different slant on her interpretation.

> *Candace*: *Playacting, thought Cassy, she ought to have guessed that Goldie wouldn't be doing any real work.* And again, I noticed how much her thoughts changed towards this by the end of the story. [second reading]

Joanna, too, altered her opinion of Goldie on the second reading.

> *Joanna*: When Cassy's wondering, you know, she could never picture her mum working, I think it shows how little faith she has in her and that, in turn, affects right in the end when she, in fact, saves her. [second reading]

Joanna, more than the other readers, also noticed how Cassy's views were affected by Nan's.

> *Joanna*: How Goldie came through, she's she still believed in, she still believed her daughter, but how Cassy didn't really, I think she was still under the influence of her grandmother, that Goldie was not good, Goldie couldn't do anything on her own. [second reading]

Joanna and Candace were relatively sophisticated readers, but Brenda also perceived a change in Goldie.

> *Brenda*: I think at the end that Goldie was more supportive and she, like, was really responsible. [second reading]

It is possible to discuss these unanimous yet divergent voices in terms of Rabinowitz's rules of reading. It does seem fairly clear-cut that all the readers are observing the rules of notice in the same way. A childish mother and an adult child are worthy of note. When it comes to applying rules of signification, of deciding how to attend to what they have decided to notice, however, the readers broke ranks. Some applied the evidence of the plot development; others made assessments about the reliability of the observer. Either way, they reconsidered whether Cassy's opinion of Goldie was entirely trustworthy and/or borne out by events.

Goldie's character certainly provides an interesting example of a text in action, both enabling and constraining certain interpretations. The response of the readers clearly suggests that a text can establish clear priorities which readers will attempt to meet. The readers' attitudes about Goldie supply a fascinating testimonial to ways in which texts can evoke responses which are both singular and plural.

The picture of Mick: notice, signification, and anticipation

The photograph of Cassy's father is first mentioned on the first page of Chapter 1.

> When she woke up again it was morning. Nan was standing at the foot of the bed, beside the chest of drawers. On top of the chest, level with Nan's face, was the big, framed photograph of Cassy's father as a little boy. Both of them stood very straight, shining clean, but not smiling. Mother and son.
>
> Nan was staring straight at Cassy, but the boy's eyes were gazing into the distance, fixed on something beyond the picture. For a second, floating up out of sleep, Cassy wondered what it was. (3 - 4)

The word "Nan" did not immediately signal "grandmother" to most of these readers, and this may be one reason why they did not easily establish the relationship between Mick, Nan, and Cassy. Although Cross gives the information about the relationship in this passage, it may not be entirely clear, especially to readers who are busy establishing the world of the story. "Both of them stood very straight" may be a confusing sentence, since one of the two people is standing in a photograph across the room, and the other is standing in the flesh alongside Cassy's bed.

The picture is mentioned again on page 8, as Cassy reaches for her pencil-case, in order to pack it.

> It was lying next to the picture, and the solemn little boy caught Cassy's eye. She picked up the photograph and tilted it to the light, wondering, for the thousandth time, where he was now. Were his eyes still fixed on something that no one else could see? What did he look like?
>
> *Mick Phelan.*
>
> She shaped the words with her lips, making no sound. Knowing, as she had always known, that they must not be spoken out loud.

> "Cassy!" Nan called from the kitchen. "What are you at? It's time you were on your way."
>
> Guiltily, Cassy grabbed the pencil-case and, barely realizing what she was doing, crammed photograph and pencil-case, both together, in on top of the postcards. (8)

In Chapter 2, the photograph merges into the first dream. Cassy is unpacking.

> The photograph on top slid sideways and she caught it just before it hit the floor. It had better go on the mantelpiece at once, out of harm's way. She stood up and put it right in the middle, so that the solemn, boy's face stared down towards her makeshift bed. But not quite at it. However Cassy shifted the picture, she had never been able to make those eyes look at her.
>
> They were still gazing across and beyond her as she settled under the blankets, wriggling to get herself comfortable on the hard floor. And when she closed her eyes, the solemn face jumbled with the rest of the day, making strange pictures as she sank into sleep.

All ten readers commented in some way on this photograph. Again, it was is if the rules of notice worked more or less universally but the rules of signification were open to more personal interpretation.

Peter Rabinowitz describes what he calls the "other-shoe rule: when one shoe drops, you should expect the other." (1987, 133) A number of readers looked at the photograph in such terms, pointing out that it would not be mentioned if it were not going to re-appear later.

> *Brenda*: And, um, that picture that she has, it seems very, like, it's very suspicious because it, it always mentions, it mentioned it in Chapter 1 and I think it might have something to do later in the book. [first reading]

* * *

> *Hami*: She just, you know, she just puts the picture and, you know, you know something's going to happen with the picture later on in the story. [first reading]
>
> *Hami*: It makes you wonder, you know, what's going to happen, is he going to be later in the story, because why would they put a person in the picture without having a purpose for it? So, um, accidentally she packed the picture, so you know that she's going to look at it later on in the book. [second reading]

* * *

> *Christine*: And then when she was putting her pencil-case in the suitcase, I didn't think she would put the photograph in, so I think the photograph must have something to do with it. [first reading]

* * *

> *Denise*: Then she went to sleep and put her, the picture on the mantel, and it talked about how the eyes wouldn't stare at her, and I think it might have something to do with later in the story, about who he turns out to be and what he's like. [second reading]

Some readers made note of the name, which seemed to them to be strange and unusual. Hami assumed that Cassy couldn't pronounce the name, although the text specifies that what she must not do is say the name aloud. Debbie also guessed that there must be some exotic significance to Mick's name.

> *Debbie*: Um, well, this name, Mick Phelan, I, it's, it's a strange, it's a different name, it's, it's definitely somebody who is unusual. It must be somebody very important because it's not a regular name, it's not a common name like Joe Smith or whatever. Again, I don't have enough information to draw any conclusions about, um, I know that it, it's going to be a different sort of character, you know. [first reading]

Candace and Keith registered the emotional impact of the picture of an unknown father, and connected it to events in their own lives.

> *Candace*: And then, here she's looking at her, her father's picture. And then she, she puts it into, on top of the postcards and I think it's in the suitcase, and I remember thinking about my family because my mum, my parents are divorced. [first reading]

* * *

> *Keith*: Um, when she looks at the photograph, she, she tilts it to the light wondering for the thousandth time where he was now. Now earlier it says that it was her father, but my curiosity is, why does she not know where he is? That bringing back personal memory; generally I don't know where mine was, and to live with him for the first time in roughly sixteen years was quite amazing. [first reading]

Like, Hami and Debbie, Keith also wondered about the name Phelan.

> *Keith*: Now, what's this word here, Mick Phel*an*. I don't know what it means and I don't know what it is and I'm not sure that I'm pronouncing it right.
>
> *Margaret*: Phelan, I think, probably.
>
> *Keith*: Even still, she, um, she shaped the word with her lips, making no sound. Now, why is it that these words aren't to be spoken? Again, essentially, what do they mean? [first reading]

Phelan is actually a relatively common Irish name, but the predictive power of that knowledge was lost on all the readers. Instead, some of them concentrated on the fact, heavily emphasized in the text, that Mick's eyes would never meet Cassy's. Ed, especially, tried to make this item cohere with other information he had collected about the book.

> *Ed*: I, I'm confused as to who the boy is in the picture. Um, I'm not sure what the, what the connection is there. Um, I also think, Were his eyes still fixed on something that no one else could see? I also assume that's connected with the events of the last night, just, but that has more to do with the assumptions from the title and the cover. [first reading]

Not all comments reflect this kind of urge towards coherence. Ed himself, later in the book, and also some of the other readers were also content, at times, simply to note the phenomenon of the unfocused eyes.

> *Ed*: I was still wondering about the boy. I was wondering why she was attempting to connect her eyes with the picture, or connect the boy's eyes to her in the picture, whether it was done to discern whether he was actually looking away from the camera. I was wondering why he was looking away from the camera. [first reading]

* * *

> *Denise*: She had her photograph and she just, she put it on the mantelpiece and she, every time she looked at it she tried to shift it so that she could make the eyes look at her, but they wouldn't, they were still gazing across. [first reading]

* * *

> *Joanna*: Yeah, and her father, she tries to arrange the picture so, he seems to be staring up at something and no matter how she arranges it, he can't stare at her. [first reading]

I think it is important to register the kind of recording of information in the last three quotes. It appears to be almost passive; the readers are receiving but they do not appear to be making very strenuous efforts to make use of these data at this stage. It is not always necessary to *do* something with information from the text, apart from note it. Both Ed and Denise tried to sort out the significance of this image at other stages in their reading, but at the point of these quotations, they are simply recording. Greg supplies an even more neutral example.

> *Greg*: Once again she picks up the picture of her father and looks at it for the thousandth time. [second reading]

It is interesting to observe a number of different ways of registering information from the text, supplied by the responses to this small point in the story. Candace and Keith, not surprisingly, supplied emotional reverberations from their own, closely connected experience. Brenda, Hami, Christine, Ed and Denise tried to fit the photograph into the structure of the story as they understood it so far. Hami, Keith and Debbie took Mick's name as exotic and tried to work out what information they might derive from that assessment. Yet there are also examples of simple recording of information as well.

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the predictive acuity of readers, by the intelligence with which they link images and make predictions. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that much of our reading experience may be summed up by the motto, "Wait and see." One of the reassuring things about a book is that you know there will be some kind of shaping to it, whether you go to the trouble of figuring it out or not. The passive recording of information as it arrives need not be perceived as inertness. The fact that most of those readers who responded so neutrally also, at some other time, even talking just about this one small point, tried to make connections, suggests that neither pattern of response may be sufficient on its own.

The mirror room: pattern, rupture, and passing theory

The winter aconite is textually marked; it first appears in the first dream which is separated from the rest of the text. The two words make a complete paragraph, and the next paragraph draws attention back to the name: "She stared at them, knowing--in her dream--that they had some other name. Some meaning that she needed to understand." (19)

Goldie comes with an affective charge; Cassy has spent a chapter and a half being very reluctant to go and stay with her. The effort of finding her has been enormous, made more difficult by Goldie's own carelessness in notifying Nan about her new address. When Cassy finally arrives, she perceives Goldie as immature and silly. Goldie's house is in such an uproar that the effect is one almost of a hostile environment. No wonder all the readers noticed Goldie.

The picture of Mick gains significance by repetition. The words and phrases which Cross uses to describe it are repeated from one chapter to the next. It is clearly a part of the puzzle which motivates the plot, and it gains interest as part of the general enigma of Cassy's departure.

The description of the mirror room is not so charged, at least not on the first reading. I would argue that it marks the first step into the world of the fairy tale fragments, but, of course, the reader does not know this effect is imminent on first meeting the bedroom lined with mirrors. There is no typographical marking to indicate that something of special importance is happening.

The mirror room does not slide unnoticeably into the smooth progress of the story, nevertheless. One very experienced reader, a spectator of rather than a participant in this particular study, got to the description of the room late at night. "I knew it was important," she told me later, "and I knew I was too tired to read something that significant at that time of night, so I put the book down and went back to it the next day." Only the words of the text could have keyed that reaction, and she was clearly sensitive to the effect of those words.

There are no asterisks as Cassy enters the mirror room, no italics, no different form in indentation. Nevertheless, Cross flags the significance of the description in a number of ways. The sentence which precedes the description functions cleverly to slow the reader down. Words and punctuation work together to trigger a warning that something important is about to follow: "Cassy pushed the door open, took one step--and stopped in confusion." (14)

The next sentence, the first of the seven paragraphs of description, represents a rupture in the smooth flowing of the story. The single sentence makes up the complete paragraph, and Cross suddenly switches to a highly alliterative evocation of a single image. "It was like walking into an infinite forest, full of fireflies." (14) Up to now the prose has been brisk and serviceable, "sensible" like Cassy. This sentence is not brisk; the repeated use of consonants such as *n* and *l* and *f* serves to lengthen and slow the vowel sounds. Correspondingly, the meaning, the sense of the sentence, detaches itself from its no-nonsense predecessors.

In the paragraphs which follow, Cassy struggles to sort out the sensory impressions which bombard her. The flickering "destroyed her sense of space." It took her more than a minute to work out "where the boundaries were."

An analysis of the words as fixed on the page is relatively straightforward and clear-cut. Something important is happening in the text at this point. I have argued that this scene represents the threshold into the world of the fairy tales.

The seven paragraphs of description bring the action of the story to a complete halt. In effect, time stands still (though only a little more than a minute passes) between the moment when Cassy stopped in confusion and the moment, at the end of the seventh paragraph, when she resumed movement.

> It was like walking into an infinite forest, full of fireflies.
>
> The darkness flickered with points of flame and dipped and swelled all round her, retreating endlessly. Between the flames were dark flowers and flashes of colour that defied her eyes and teased her mind. Were they large or small? Near or far?
>
> The room had no limits. Left and right, behind and in front and above, the lights and the flowers surrounded her with patterns that destroyed her sense of space. The shock of it froze her brain and she gripped the handle of her suitcase, standing completely still as she worked out where the boundaries were.
>
> It took her more than a minute. Slowly she realized that she was looking at reflections. The only real lights were two candles, standing in bottles in the middle of the floor. Their flames were reflected backwards and forwards, over and over, up and down, in a hundred fragments of mirror.
>
> There were pieces of mirror stuck all over the walls and the ceiling. Some were coloured, some were engraved or bevelled or painted and some were plain. Some were stuck flat to the wall and some were set at an angle. In every piece, the flames danced differently.
>
> Dozens of pieces of cloth were draped round the mirrors, hiding the sharp straight edges and filling the gaps with shadowed images. Sombre flowers were overlapped by plain, dark cloth, and dim leaves twined in and out of dusty velvet. Here and there a few silver folds gleamed white, like silver birch trunks in a wood of yew and holly.
>
> Behind the flames, between the tree trunks, among the shadows, there were human shapes, infinitely reflected and repeated like the candles. But, like the candles, only two of them were real. Slowly Cassy turned to face them. (14)

When I came to analyze the shape and design of the text, the forcefulness and importance of this scene struck me clearly. In the temporal act of reading the story, however, especially for the first time, this chronological standstill is not necessarily as evident as it appears in retrospect. I cannot remember my own first reading with any precision, but I certainly do not recall being especially startled by this scene, the first time around. I did not have the sophisticated response of the reader who put the book down until she was less tired. There was no hint yet of fairy tales and I was not expecting them; the magic forest struck me only as an elaborately arranged bedroom.

The ten student readers had responses closer to mine than to that of the reader who stopped reading at this stage. Most of them noticed the room; only Brenda made no comment on either reading. Many of them remarked only that they were noticing as they passed by. Some of them were completely perfunctory.

> *Greg*: It was just pretty straightforward, just describing the house and Lyall. [second reading]

* * *

> *Christine*: And then, on page 15 and 14, I paid more attention to the setting of the room with the mirrors. [second reading]

One or two commented briefly on their reaction to the room full of mirrors.

> *Hami*: She goes in and she sees so many candlelights and what she notices that it's all mirror and everything. It's kind of a nice room, it kind of makes you wonder how it looks and everything. You picture it and all that. [first reading]

* * *

> *Denise*: And when they, she finally went up to the room, it was a really beautiful room and there was mirrors and candles. [first reading]

Some readers paused to give a more personal response, and to try to extract some further information about the book from this description and the connotations it suggested.

> *Keith*: What's with this, this room? It's quite an imaginative room with mirrors all over the place and cloth and flowers, as it said. It's interesting to me but it, you just got to ask yourself, you know, it's kind of extravagant. I mean, I could see a room with posters on the wall or something, but pieces of mirror everywhere? Why? Um, it kind of, it kind of adds to an interesting effect as to say that maybe again they're narcotics users and it's a room for, like, chilling down or whatever. I don't know. It sounds like something I would have done to my room a few years back. Um, here, she says, here and there a few silver folds of gleamed, a few silver folds gleamed white like silver birch trunks in a wood of yew and holly. What's yew? I'd have to assume it's a tree or a plant or something. . . . And then the holly's kind of green so I'd imagine it is too. Now why is it so dark in this room? [first reading]

* * *

> *Joanna*: And this room, just the sort of, the things that it's got on the walls and everything, it seems like sort of a hippie-ish theme, you know, the flowers and the candles, they're all, I'm thinking I might have just a hint of time, it's probably between the 60s and 70s. [first reading]

A couple of readers produced a more affective response.

> *Candace*: And then, it says it was like walking into an infinite forest full of fireflies. That made me think, there's a scene in *The Phantom of the Opera* where there's just candles everywhere, I thought of that. And then, all this talking about dozens of pieces of cloth draped round the mirrors made me feel like I was in some kind of type of imprisonment, closed, closed in a small dark area. [first reading]

* * *

> *Ed*: Then, when she walked into the room surrounded with mirrors, um, and dancing candles, it seemed confusing and I was wondering, um, what exactly was happening. Although it said that the room was large, I got the feeling that the room was actually very small. Um, it seemed, it seemed, it seemed to me, I, I connected with, with a room of my cousin's for some reason, in terms of the shape and size. [first reading]

Only Debbie produced what might be called a textual response; that is, she registered that something was working in the words themselves and looked for some kind of shaping strategy at work. She did not pick up the idea of the threshold, on either reading, but she did comment on a particular kind of patterning at work.

> *Debbie*: This, um, description of, of Goldie's room, um, was very vivid and I didn't actually, I couldn't figure out what it was. I thought it was some sort of re-living of the hippie era or something like that, very psychedelic and very bright, but, um, I couldn't really figure it out. This sort of matched the, the two bits of colour that Cassy saw in the beginning, um, but I couldn't make any more connections between the two. [first reading]

Debbie elaborated on this suggestion in her second reading.

> *Debbie*: Um, all the chapters went to, the number 2 seems to be particularly significant. I didn't catch it the first time, I catch it now, it seems, but I'm not sure if it really means anything or if it's just something that, that I'm just--
>
> *Margaret*: Can you give me an example?
>
> *Debbie*: Um, well, yeah, the two patch, patches of startling colour, um, the two candles. [second reading]

She returned to this theme a few lines later.

> *Debbie*: Um, and then, the two patches of startling colour, they sort of stand out with all this dreariness. It seems to me now that it's, it's like, um, um,

> Lyall and Goldie, how they stand out completely in their little, in their ordinary world. [second reading]

It would be interesting to develop this question of the repeated use of the number two in the story, and it would be possible to develop an argument that the essential pair at the end of the book were, in fact, Mick and Cassy; that the rest of the story is a set of distracting fragments; that the accountability of father to daughter is at the heart of the book. Debbie did not make such an argument, but it is clear that she is more aware of the contrived nature of this description than most of the other readers--at least while actually reading.

Two readers provide other routes to a kind of reading of the mirror room. Joanna was open to an elaborate discussion of the mirror room at a later time, after her reading was complete. And Ed, on his second reading, did raise the question of the description, but he raised it to reject it.

> *Ed*: Um, I didn't see the point of the room with the mirrors. That was, well, in terms of the story, I didn't understand how it tied in with any of the story. Maybe perhaps thematically or to set atmosphere with the dreams that she has, sort of abstract thoughts, but I did not, couldn't understand why it was there. [second reading]

Joanna's readiness to engage in scrutiny of the text, in order to increase her pleasure in the book as a whole, marks one kind of reading, a more hermeneutic approach, although enlivened, in Joanna's case, by a great deal of excitement. It would be easy to say that Ed, even on the second reading, was still struggling with an inadequate set of fairy tale references which rendered much of the working of the text unavailable to him. This may well have been the case, but we must not forget that the reader is entitled to dislike a part of the text, to find it superfluous and unhelpful. In fact, Ed registered the importance of the description far more sensitively than many of the other readers, even as he spoke of his distaste for it.

In a literary analysis, it is possible to argue that the description of the mirror room plays a highly important role in the shaping of the story. On the whole, the responses of the readers suggest that, at best, this importance was registered subliminally. How do we weigh the importance of this subdued response? Is the passage in the text less important because a number of readers have failed to notice it? If the sample of readers were a hundred times larger and they all more or less overlooked the importance of the description, would that make a difference to how we judge the passage? Is there such a thing as empirical success in this kind of textual manoeuvre?

I find it interesting that the mirror room did not appear to make much of an immediate impact. In my own view, this reaction does not undermine the importance of the passage in the design of the book. A complex text will not reveal all its workings on one or two readings; if we could develop a saturated reading so quickly, there would be no reason ever to look at it again. Joanna's readiness to explore the significance of the passage, some time after completing her second reading of it, suggests that the pleasures of the text can linger past the point where the specifically linear and temporal processes stop. This is a different approach from what is represented by the development of a passing theory and suggests some of the limitations of concentrating on the moment of contact with the text.

The pedagogical issue, of course, is whether it is worthwhile to explore the workings of the text without the fuel of Joanna's kind of engagement. In a way, a textual, hermeneutic approach is a kind of simulation of a temporal reading, just as creating a map is a way of simulating a walk through a landscape. If, however, the energy of the engaged reading process has to be simulated as well, the process may well become too artificial to hold much meaning for the reader.

It isn't, of course, that simple. There are times when at least the kind of engagement represented by admiration is won posthumously, as it were. Exploring the intricacies of construction may actually persuade you to give a book another chance. In any case, teachers do not have the luxury of discussing only those books which passionately move their students. For example, of the ten readers here, chosen more or less at random, only one really loved the book.

The responses to the description of the mirror room usefully remind us that closing the book may not really mean the end of the story. Even an engaged and committed reader almost certainly will not pick up every detail, even in multiple readings. Here, perhaps, is one substantial role for the triangulating power of other readers.

Beginning the book: pragmatics, fictionality and inference

The final passage I want to analyze is the opening section of the book, and with this extract we return to the whole question of fictionality with which I began this dissertation. Before they even started on the text, the readers were clearly aware that it was being offered to them as a piece of fiction. The consent form which they had all signed refers to the book as a novel; the paperback edition, published by Puffin, bears all the hallmarks of a fictional book; the title, while ambiguous, is a plausible novel title.

At any rate, by whatever pragmatic or paratextual route, the readers all seemed very clear that they were processing a fiction. Only one response raises any question about the fictional nature of the world of *Wolf*, and that was raised by Joanna after she had responded twice to all four chapters.

> *Joanna*: So Lyall, Lyall knew that, that Mick was the, the Cray Hill bomber, is that who he is?
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah.
>
> *Joanna*: The Cray Hill bomber. Was there really ever--this is just fiction, right? There's never--
>
> *Margaret*: No. There were bombings but not, not--
>
> *Joanna*: Oh, of course. So did he work for the IRA or--?
>
> *Margaret*: Mick?

> *Joanna*: Mick.
>
> *Margaret*: Yeah.
>
> *Joanna*: Okay. I see.

Joanna here seems to me to be establishing how much overlap exists between the fictional world and the actual world, to be dealing with the possibility that *Wolf* is a historical novel. Questions of fictional boundaries are often complex and untidy, and she wanted to clear up at least one limit. Establishing the parameters of the fictional world was important to many of the readers. The other readers seem simply to have assumed that the border lay between a real IRA and a fictional Cray Hill.

Greg's remarks provide clear instances of the problem which Christopher Collins described: that, in receiving a story told by someone else, you do not have access to the experience which informed that story but only to the convention-bound description of that experience. Greg offers a relatively extreme example of a reader trying to place a figure in a ground yet to be determined.

> *Greg*: At first, I couldn't decide whether Cassy was a boy or a girl. When I read that I thought it was a boy and then it was a girl, but it's a girl. [first reading]

Greg had other placing work to do as well.

> *Greg*: I hadn't realized it was, like, in the present, like with the Underground, stuff like that. It was, like, past. It seemed like it, right, just so far pretty straightforward. [first reading]

His final adjective is striking. In my print of the transcript, he uses the first six lines to say that he had had to make decisions about the gender of the protagonist and the era of the setting, a procedure which, in the seventh line, he describes as straightforward.

These readers know about reading novels, and this appears to include the knowledge that you must expect to add ground to your initial figures. Candace also remarks without surprise, "I didn't quite understand that they were in England." [first reading]

Not knowing everything is clearly part of the beginnings of books, and Ed, similarly, comments how he attempts to establish his ground.

> *Ed*: Um, at the beginning, um, I was confused as to who "he" was. Um, I, from the title I assume, um, from the title and the cover actually, I assume that it will be some kind of wolfman. [first reading]

Keith, in his meticulously detailed commentary on his first reading, supplied several examples of how he used information in the text to fill in what was not there.

> *Keith*: Um, the way they use, rather, when his feet pad along the balcony,

> that struck me curious cause the chapter, or the book itself, is called *Wolf* and when his feet *padded*, that gives me a sense of there being pads on his feet which isn't humanistic. [first reading]

> *Keith*: Um, she's got to be a touch older, granted this is English I'm assuming, or at least the story takes place, I would, I assume that anyway, but nevertheless she's got to be, I would assume, older than ten to be eating, or to be drinking tea. At this time, most parents or nurses, as I've still taken into assumption that she is, um, wouldn't let a small child consume that much caffeine. [first reading]

Debbie was actually explicit about a strategy for beginning a new book.

> *Debbie*: Um, the first thing I noticed was setting. I always look for setting when I'm reading a book and I noticed it's somewhere, the first thing I noticed was somewhere in Britain, somewhere in England or somewhere, um, it seems to me like a low-class sort of slum area, from, um, the, the description of their home and their clothing. [first reading]

Collins describes the "uncanny strangeness" of verbal visuality.

> The simple fact that literary texts are not drawn from the reader's experiential store (nor for that matter very often drawn wholesale from the *author*'s experience) means that the figures that they induce in the minds of readers are foregrounded upon a necessarily absent background. (1991, 151)

In these quotes, we can see the readers making use of different strategies to fill in some of the absent background. Some of them used such understanding as they possessed of life in contemporary Britain; some of them drew on implications they perceived in the title and cover. They seemed to take two issues for granted: that *Wolf* is fictional and that part of their job as readers was to explore the limits and parameters of that fictional world and its relationship to a world they could recognize.

The readers in this study were entirely matter-of-fact about the need to make use of their real-world knowledge wherever it would be helpful in sorting out the fictional universe of the novel. It is the example of a failure in this process which stands out as a marked event. When Greg perceived a clash between what he understood about the real world, as perceived through movies and television (semtex is grey) and the fact used by Gillian Cross to propel both the events and the imagery of *Wolf* (semtex is yellow), he was most indignant and kept returning to the idea that the author had not treated him fairly.

Although nobody articulated such notions explicitly, it seems very clear that these readers know how you treat a fictional world. They know how to step into it and start to engage even before the first and most essential information is clearly in place. They know that you can explore the borders, expect overlap between the fictional and the experienced world, import real-world information and understanding into the invented universe and expect it to work until it is established that it won't.

These readers all had a background of successful contact with novels at some time in their backgrounds. Not all readers are as comfortable as the ten in this study with the limits of fictionality. Dennis Sumara (1994), in his doctoral dissertation, describes Tim, who was reading a historical novel, *Forbidden City* by William Bell. Tim used textual and historical evidence to claim that this book was not fictional: it described the events of Tien An Men Square in May and June of 1989, events which happened in history. He also claimed that the diary format of the novel proved that it had been recorded at the time and could not thus be written off as fiction. In short, Tim refused to accept the particular pragmatic agreement that establishes *Forbidden City* in a special relationship to the real world, one which imports historical events into a fictional universe.

The readers of *Wolf* accepted the book as fiction from the outset. Such problems as they had with establishing the nature and extent of its territory arose from gaps in their own background knowledge about London and particularly about squats. By and large, these gaps did not cause them to question the authenticity of the story, although I have spoken with other Canadian readers who find the idea of the squat inherently implausible and a genuine stumbling-block to their engagement with the book.

Moving "into" a fiction is an essential first step for readers of novels, if they are to have any kind of engagement with the story. In these transcripts, this essential step is implicit in the responses of the readers, but it is nowhere described by any of them. This fact should not surprise us; the phenomenon is one which is very difficult to describe and impossible to explain in a set of rules. Perhaps in this area above all others, it is a case where practice is the only route to understanding. These readers all had a background of sufficient exposure to and practice in the subtle art of joining the world of a novel. To them it appears to be a part of reading that you do not have to mention or explain.

Part IV

RE-DESCRIBING READING

Chapter 10

"SHALL I SHOW YOU THE PATH? WE COULD PLAY A LITTLE GAME": RE-DESCRIBING READING

I have been daunted many times in the course of organizing this project, but perhaps never so much as when faced with the challenge of drawing the many threads together and arriving at some kind of summary or conclusion. I have attempted to be thorough and comprehensive in my consideration of the numerous factors at work in any complex reading act; the consequence is, not surprisingly, a large and complicated description. To summarize this complexity seems, in some ways, like a contradiction in terms.

Many of the conclusions drawn over the course of this project are rightly embedded in the descriptions of particular readers. One of the irreducible elements of reading is its heterogeneity, and there is little point in attempting to extrapolate generalizations from singular examples.

So there is no use pretending that a tidy summary is possible. Instead, this chapter will encompass what I hope will be a more fruitful option, an attempt to re-describe the processes of reading fiction. This re-description will take account of the many theoretical approaches already described and also make room for the insights provided by the readers in this study.

Re-describing the reading of fiction

Engagement

Reading any fiction is a large enterprise, which builds upon itself and expands as it proceeds. Even a short story calls for a substantial investment of effort over time; the requirements of novel reading magnify that effect. A reader begins with conventional assumptions about the book, derived in various ways. Some assumptions are rooted in our cultural understanding of fiction; others arise from the provenance of the book. In the case of a novel like *Wolf*, there is relatively little confusion at the outset that the story is fictional; title, cover, opening pages all lead to the same conclusion. In other books, the fictionality of the story might take longer to establish, and sorting out the parameters of the fictional world might make up a larger proportion of initial reading activities. In any case, the reader must somehow, at some stage of the reading, register the fictional operator or governor: the pragmatic contract to make-believe. This contract arises from a cultural game; the rules may vary in different settings (oral versus literate cultures, a performed art as opposed to a printed one, for example) but they are constitutive of the reading performance and very powerful in their implicit guidance. The writer's invitation to the reader is remarkably similar to the wolf's murmured seduction of Cassy: "*Shall I show you the path? We could play a little game.*"

The preliminary stages

Having committed themselves to the idea of joining the fictional performance, readers must have strategies for dealing with the initial stages of a text. The one part of the reading procedure which should work automatically right from the outset is the recognition of individual words. Grouping and storing the initial phrases and sentences should also start up without too much activating attention. But the process of reading a story needs as soon as possible to hang on larger organizational hooks than those provided by sentence limits.

The early contact with a book must establish many kinds of information: some early outline of the preliminary elements of the story (setting, characters, etc.); some grasp of the way the author moves from sentence to sentence and from page to page, so that the reader can build up a strategic approach to such operations as wrap-up, chunking and cohesion; some initial idea of what kind of affective connections may be made (whether these involve an early connection between elements of the story and important affective issues for the reader, or whether they involve more general text-based affects such as suspense or humour). The need of the reader at this point is to automatize at least some of these operations as quickly as possible; otherwise attention becomes diffuse, impeding or even preventing any build-up of momentum.

At this early stage of reading any fiction, there must be some considerable emphasis on the development of automaticity and momentum because the risk of foundering can be substantial. An early priority is to get to the point of amassing enough initial data to start work on the creation of the first passing theories: ideas which may develop or disappear as extra data comes in. I suspect that as readers read more and more fiction, they develop strategies for coping with that initial shortfall of information: they learn how to suspend themselves in a net of inadequately connected threads and to rely on their confidence that further support will be forthcoming.

The metaphor of the reader orchestrating the coordination of bottom-up and top-down information is a useful one at this juncture, but in the beginning stages of reading a new fiction, the reader perhaps resembles the kind of comedian who runs the orchestra by himself, running from instrument to instrument to get each one humming or vibrating or twanging before any real orchestration can begin. The words lie on the page waiting to be activated, and, in the early stages, the reader's attention is entirely devoted to start-up pressures.

This image should not rule out the idea that one aspect of the text can immediately grab more attention than others. The young children responding to the opening sentence, "Can I play?" seemed to be displaying a stronger affective response than they did to other texts. There may indeed be an argument that affective response is one kind of motor which takes over the tuning-up process, and speeds the onset of automaticity.

Getting going in this initial stage of reading a fiction is one crucial and often underestimated challenge. Different reading experiences offer different ways to practise making the connection with a new story. People, for example, read stories which have already been read to them, either by another person or on a tape or the radio. Sometimes they read a book in which elements of setting or character have already been established in a related book or on a television program. They read series books and sequels and books of the movie. Such extra-textual assistance may actually strengthen or undermine their repertoire of strategies for opening contact with a printed story.

Readers can also re-read, of course; and this tactic may represent a particularly important form of practice in the under-acknowledged challenge of engaging with a fictional world. The reluctance of many of the readers in this study ever to re-read is a feature which deserves some attention; I will return to this issue later.

In the early stages of the reading, accountability to the text is important but the reader's hold on accuracy may be fragile, perhaps undermined by a major preliminary misinterpretation or sabotaged by the misunderstanding of individual words. In any case, accountability, while remaining important, must temporarily take second place to the imperative for developing some momentum. Mere accurate decoding is not sufficient at this point to engage a reader in the dynamics of the ongoing story.

The initial challenge is to sort out what is actually present in the text, to establish what may be important in the personal echo-chambers of association which attend the printed words, and to begin work on the elimination of what is simply not applicable in this case. In order to accomplish this task without being paralysed by uncertainty, readers must know how to suspend their need to understand everything at once. We have seen one reader even prepared to wonder for a page or two if he should be thinking of the protagonist as male or female. One of the important and largely untaught skills of reading fiction is this ability to be able to live temporarily with not knowing much about anything. There are books, of course, which spin out this absence of vital information even to the very end of the book; main characters can be continue to be nameless and sexless to take one very obvious example. As Christopher Collins points out, when you deal with words you are dealing with conventional rather than experiential bodies; and a conventional creation can exist in the teeth of all kinds of restrictions which would be impossible in actual experience.

In any case, readers of even the most uncomplicated book must start their reading with an insufficiency of information. They must concentrate their attention on coordinating what little input they do have until they reach the point where they can start to make connections rather more automatically and begin to generate passing theories about the connections they are tentatively making. They must find a way to balance the need for accountability and the need for momentum and they must do this in a way which allows for moments of suspension between the two requirements and which enables readers to adjust to the rhythms and shapes of the text.

Good enough reading and its implications

At many points in a book, but perhaps especially at the beginning, many readers will establish a balance between the different calls on their attention which I have described as "good enough." This is an approach which allows momentum to build up. A good enough supposition or interpretation can be provisional only, transitory, dropped when its usefulness expires. Alternatively, it may deepen into an understanding which is inadequate or actually misleading. A reader is sometimes but not always a good judge of when it is important to re-assess a good enough interpretation; and a first impression may have a long life, even when its usefulness is expired.

One of the reasons for carrying on with good enough images and interpretations is to enable the reader to remain engaged in the world of the fiction. Making this engagement is an important priority for a reader in the early stages of a book especially. As momentum builds up, it is possible that good enough understandings develop out of an automatic switching between bottom-up and top-down processing. A recognition simply that a textual item has a role in the composition of the story may substitute for a detailed understanding of its meaning; the reader learns to adopt a placeholder strategy. Sometimes the good enough placeholder is replaced by a later and clearer understanding; sometimes it must make do permanently; sometimes it is simply forgotten as further information rolls in.

The development of stamina

One element of novel-reading, which is invisible in the kind of reading research that deals with small, artificial texts and which is underestimated in the kind of literary critique that concentrates on short, perfectly-formed poems, is the development of stamina. Readers need to be able to persevere both in the initial stages when momentum is being developed, and also as the plot thickens and the mental organization of information becomes complicated. The readers in this study supply only a partial and skewed perspective on this issue; they were all artificially motivated to keep going by the nature of the study itself. Nevertheless, there are remarks which indicate some capacity to struggle on in the face of bewilderment. Here is Candace describing how she read the book at home:

> After the first couple of chapters, I, I guess it must have been eight or nine or ten, um, I was thinking it was really hard to understand, and, but then it was one of the books that I enjoyed, that I liked. I enjoyed it, and after I read it, there were so many little things that suddenly seemed to just click in my mind cause there were so many things that don't make sense until the book's finished, so-- But it was, it was a pretty good book, confusing but, but very good. It, it's like you had to think to read it instead of just, you know, *The Baby-sitters Club*, where it's just not very difficult. [second reading]

Candace's description of her reading history indicates that she was probably ripe for developing as a reader at the time when she encountered *Wolf*. But Hami, who could probably be fairly described as a weaker reader than Candace, also showed that he had some strategies (admittedly limited) for coping with confusion.

> If, like, I read the first two chapters or the first four and I don't understand it and then later on in the book I get used to the book, then I go back in, you know, I kind of make sense. Like once I read *The Book of Three*. It was a first series, so I didn't, I didn't like it actually, so until it got, you know, where he fights the Horned King and everything, so I go, I went back in, read, read the first two chapters over.

What made Hami, reading for himself outside of any research context, persevere with *The Book of Three* even though he didn't really like it and it didn't really make sense to him? If we could find a generalizable and transferrable answer to that question, we would have solved one of the big invisible mysteries of literature teaching.

The role of affect

I do not claim to have that answer but I do think that part of what fuels many readers' progress through a text is their capacity to animate the characters they read about with emotions transferred from their own experiences. There may be readers who do not draw upon their own affective experiences in this way, but there are certainly many who do, including a majority of the readers in this study. The nature of the project ensured that these readers articulated the experiences which led them to enliven the scenes and characters with transferred affect. As Gelernter has pointed out, some of these emotions are primary and vivid; so, for example, we can see Keith transferring his own sensations over leaving home at short notice into his understanding of Cassy's feelings. But often the relationship between the original and the fictional experiences is oblique and subtle. It is arguable that only the artificial circumstances of the interview made Ed actually describe incidents which supplied him with a kind of affective schema for animating Cassy's emotions in his own mind. Nevertheless, whether or not he would have made the original source explicit to himself if reading on his own, it is clear that he was providing quite nuanced emotional depth to his reading of Cassy's story out of his own stored experiences. The concept of affect linking is very useful in the description of this process.

The implications of this possibility are worth exploring further. Cassy exists as a character in a book. In Collins's terms she can be described by convention and only by convention. We as readers do not have Cassy's experiential background. Indeed, Gillian Cross as author does not have Cassy's experiential background. It doesn't exist; Cassy is a fiction and exists only by convention. If we try to import our own experiences into the story of *Wolf*, we may supply background details that do not belong, as Daniel described so helpfully in his account of the squat (pages 158 - 160). This is probably inevitable and a consequence of the very nature of the conventions of writing. What seems to me to have more useful potential for readers is the infusion of the conventional account with our own emotional understandings, our own repertoire of affective shading and subtlety. To what extent the personal memory which belongs to a particular emotional thumbprint comes attached as part of the package is probably variable, according to reader and according to situation. Certainly the specific memories were ready to hand for Ed and Candace and Keith when they tried to articulate how it was that they understood Cassy's feelings at a particular moment. I have tried to describe the way our own emotional experiences may provide resonance for the convention-bound tokens of writing. It is difficult to be completely clear about this because the whole area is so nebulous. Nevertheless, it seems important to suggest that our own emotional understanding plays a part in the important but ill-understood project of "bringing stories to life."

Perhaps it is in this way that reading performs something of the same psychological game as T.S. Eliot's cruel but cyclical April, "mixing memory and desire." (1922/63, 63) Desire is also a part of reading; in a very complex way we merge our own desires with those of the characters, and with those of the author. Elements of desire in reading are probably the most private and impenetrable of all, and it would take a more profound exploration than I have attempted here to explore how desire works even in oneself, let alone in another reader. But I suspect that in this murky territory lies something of the energy of reading. Another poet's phrase may sum up some of this dynamism. Dylan Thomas talks about "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower" (1952/71, 8); it is a poem about time and I think it sums up some of the urgent, time-bound engagement that drives some successful reading.

The virtual other

The writer and the reader must acknowledge each other within the text, but they cannot do so in specific, personal terms because their encounter is never accomplished simultaneously. The writer must project a reader who will participate in the awakening of the words from the page; the reader must be aware of the author, at least in a notional way, as the originating agent of the words.

The readers in this study certainly acknowledged the hand of the writer, using a variety of vague and impersonal terms: she, they, it, the book. There is not enough evidence either to support a theory which suggests that this response is implicit in the idea of reading, inherent in the text, or to back a counter-theory which attributes such awareness to the outcome of instruction. Margaret Meek (1988), describing young Ben reading *Rosie's Walk*, talks about a reader learning that another person is responsible for the words and pictures of his book. Numerous children's authors have testified to the excitement of children meeting a "real" writer for the first time, but there is little in their accounts which would enable us to ground this excitement either as part of the readers' natural development or as an outcome of teaching about writers. It is quite possible that this phenomenon is a combination of both instruction and growth: just as earlier happened with print, once the child is introduced to the idea of the author as salient, the young reader starts to notice the author all over the place.

Whatever the origins of this particular understanding, it is very clear that the readers of this study were ready to recognize and acknowledge the shaping power of the author at work. Specific decisions about the roles of the implied author and the implied reader are clearly related to this more general understanding, and the connection between the specific and the general, in this case as in so many others, is probably two-way and interconnected.

Reading styles

Readers vary, among themselves and in relation to different texts, in the weight and importance which they place on affective links to the events and characters of the story. Obviously any story will speak more intensely to one reader than to another. Readers may also have personal styles of reading which affect what gives them the most pleasure. Even among the small group of readers in this study, we saw a reader whose primary connection to the material of *Wolf* was affective engagement both with events and with images (Candace), a reader whose priority lay with the establishment of detailed understanding at every step of the way (Keith), readers who interpreted the story in terms clearly carried over from other texts they had read (Brenda and Christine), readers whose main pleasure came from observing the workings of the text (Debbie and Denise), and a reader who found the motifs and metaphors of the book so exciting that her normal approach to a text was extended and even overwhelmed (Joanna). We also saw readers whose comprehension at least partially foundered on inappropriate background understandings (Greg and Ed) and a reader whose tolerance for uncertainty and confusion and whose faith that it would eventually begin to make sense enabled him to continue when none of his interpretations hung together (Hami in the early stages of his first reading).

Bussis *et al.* (1985) found distinctive reading and learning styles among five and six year old children, and suggested that such tendencies might be permanent. The preferences of the readers in this study, at least as they were manifested in their encounter with *Wolf*, do appear to be quite clear-cut and pronounced. It is surprising how small a quotation from the transcripts it takes to identify the reader.

Aesthetics and efference

We do not know if or how instruction may affect reading styles. We also know too little about the role of instruction in another important element in the reading process: the degree to which a reading is efferent or aesthetic in Rosenblatt's terms. I suspect readers may make decisions, conscious or otherwise, about how efferent their reading should be at almost any stage of the reading process. It is too easy to align the efferent read with the need for accountability to the text and the aesthetic read with the pressures of momentum, but it seems likely that there are times in the reading of a fiction when momentum sweeps the reader into a more aesthetic stance towards the text. I am reminded of the student who went out to warm up the van engine while she read a single chapter of *Jacob Have I Loved* for her class. She next noticed where she was when she reached the end of the book, with the van very warm indeed. Her first thought was one of dismay: "Oh no! I was supposed to be thinking about it!" Momentum drove an aesthetic, poetic, non-reflective engagement with the story.

Max van Manen suggests,

> One cannot be a critic and a reader at the same time. Critics are poor lovers. They cannot let go. Their minds are on the wrong things. It is only after the communal experience that we may meditate its cathartic nature and thus may be transformed further or deeper as we retroactively and self-reflectively once again appropriate the original experience. (1985, 186)

There are texts, of course, as van Manen acknowledges, which invite a reading which is more caught up in the flow of events and other texts which deliberately set out to distance and estrange the reader, making total immersion more unlikely. Some texts call for more efferent tactics than others as well.

Texts invite one kind of reading or another; readers may also start off with a specific preference for one kind of reading or the other. Keith provides an example of a reader with a clear preference for utilitarian reading, though he was happy to submit to the more aesthetic demands of *Wolf*.

> This is, to me, a story. It doesn't offer any way of thinking or financial goal. (laughs) Well, it, it's a good story, I will put that forward without hesitation and I enjoyed reading it. . . . I really enjoyed it and when I finished the last chapter I went, Ohhh, neat!

Not all readers want to be so flexible; not all readers have ever learned that it is all right to read a book just for the pleasure of the moment. Several readers in this study spoke of getting into trouble for reading too much. Society often speaks ambiguously to young people (and, indeed, to adults) about the pleasures and virtues of reading for fun.

Keith's account implies that at some stage in his reading he realized that there was little scope for self-improvement in any obvious way in his reading of *Wolf*. The reader's stance towards the book, efferent or aesthetic, may be established by the book's provenance and institutional framing; it may alternate at the text's invitation; it may be impossible to disambiguate (when I read stories of pioneer life, for example, I would be hard pressed to disentangle the efferent and informative impact of the descriptions of building, cultivating, and preserving from the aesthetic and affective accounts of insecurity, hardship, and cold).

Rules of notice and rules of signification: a system of movement

The text itself creates a role for the reader; fluctuations in the reader's stance towards this text may be part of the author's deliberate strategy in writing, or they may reflect idiosyncrasies on the part of the reader. This project did not include a large enough group of readers to make safe generalizations, but it is interesting to note a pronounced effect among the small number of readers who participated. When it came to taking note of what the author set out, they were very obedient, often approaching something like unanimity in what they considered worthy of comment. This effect was probably enhanced by the extra accountability to the text they felt as a consequence of being part of a research project. When it came to ascertaining the significance of what they had noticed, however, they were much more individual and personal in their reactions. In that play between notice and signification, to use Rabinowitz's useful terms, we may see something of the balance between structure and flexibility which makes up the dynamic of a text. Antony Easthope says, "The text exists inside as system of movement." (1991, 33) The readers in this study demonstrate both the systematic nature of the relationship with the words and also the scope for interpretation and response. To borrow a term from statistics, it is arguable that different parts of the text work on a basis of offering different "degrees of freedom." The reader must strike a balance between the kind of tentativeness that makes new discovery possible and a conception of the story which is firm enough to hold together even as new discoveries are added. It is a delicate and complicated project, but these students all show that experienced readers take that kind of balancing act for granted; it is simply part of the performance. What the data cannot explain is how these readers learned to accomplish this balance. Can such fine and subtle decision-making powers be taught or are they best acquired in practice?

Development within the text

Bussis and her co-workers raise a point about their study of beginning readers.

> [D]ata from the standard reading samples indicate that control also typically increases *within* a given reading performance, assuming a text of suitable length and difficulty. (1985, 120)

Although I am making general points about reading, it is worth emphasizing again that my evidence does come from the study of readers encountering a single literary text. I hoped when I selected *Wolf* for this project that it would be "a text of suitable length and difficulty" which would provide opportunities for readers to re-think their early strategies and take note of ways in which the author was providing an occasion for them to renegotiate the terms of encounter with the text. With the possible exception of Christine, all of the readers showed signs of this kind of gear-shifting at some point during the sessions, though in several cases that understanding developed rather more substantially in retrospect during the conversation which followed the reading. Some readers were explicit about how they began to understand the shape and pattern of the book only as they completed it.

Wolf is a book which offers room for growth in an adolescent reader. The dream sequences in particular are carefully announced in textual terms, yet the parallels between the fairy tale and the main story are only ever suggested implicitly. In the case of Joanna in particular, the transcript provides an account of her realization that there were more layers to this story than she had originally anticipated. Such moments of development are more often than not invisible in the classroom and often indeed not clear to the reader in private. There are unanswered questions about even the relatively explicit success story of Joanna. What is the impact of such a rewarding contact with a book on her general reading behaviour, attitudes and development? Has she made a permanent step forward in terms of her sensitivity to text or in terms of her self-confidence as a reader? Is there a generalizable way to consolidate such an advance? How can we allow for such growth to become cumulative?

In terms of the text itself, there are also questions. The fact that Joanna was so excited by *Wolf* and by her ability to interpret it was something that was impossible to organize in advance. The best I could do was find a text which offered room for such an encounter. No text is going to work with every reader; Greg's response to *Wolf* shows that this book which so entranced one reader was equally successful at antagonizing another. Once again, there is no easy answer.

A particular pedagogical question arises, of course, when the most enthusiastic reader in the classroom is the teacher; while it is undoubtedly preferable that the teacher enjoy the book being taught, there is a need to make room for the legitimate responses of students who are not so excited. Ingrid Johnston (1992), in her inquiry into the use of young adult literature in Alberta junior high schools, showed that one response of teachers to the problems which can arise in this area is a renewed commitment to the few reliable titles which antagonize the smallest number of students (*The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton featured prominently in this role). While this reaction is certainly understandable, there is a need to consider ways of making room for greater plurality within the classroom.

After reading

Reading does not end when the book is closed. Candace and Keith described how they continued to register patterns of the text even after they finished reading. Reading does not necessarily confine itself to the borders of the book either. Joanna, brimming over with excitement over her engagement with *Wolf*, described the book in great detail to her older brother. All the readers spoke to me about it, as part of the terms of the study. Reading may also lead on to other books. Candace and Joanna talked with me about further reading they might like. Greg read through the list of other titles by Gillian Cross printed beside the title page in his copy of *Wolf* and commented on how appealing each one sounded. There are many ways in which reading overspills its textual boundaries.

Kent has developed Davidson's concept of triangulation to incorporate the trio of text, reader and other readers. To what extent triangulation is a necessary ingredient of reading is an interesting question. Triangulation is certainly necessary in the early stages of learning to read unless we can be persuaded by the story of Tarzan who worked out how to read with no input from anything but a page of print. Margaret Clark (1976) produced a study of young fluent readers who arrived at school already able to read, despite the fact that no one in their families had given them formal lessons. Her description of the home lives of these young readers, however, makes clear how much they had gained from informal support and scaffolding, such as story reading, games involving words and numbers, identification of environmental print, the reinforcement of television advertisements which often supply a written and oral version of a brand name simultaneously, and so forth. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1920/45), in perhaps a romanticised view of history, describes the young reader of earlier times becoming familiar with the words and phrases of the Bible long before starting to read them, thanks to the daily habit of family scripture reading. It would be possible to multiply stories of the triangulation of beginning reading almost to infinity.

If the learning reader must rely on at least some information from a third party, what of the confident reader? Is triangulation a necessary, a sufficient, or an optional part of reading? Certainly, there seems little doubt that many readers enjoy being able to talk about a book they have read with someone else. Many of the readers in this study spoke of a friend who shared their reading interests, recommended titles and discussed books. Some of those without such a friend commented on how much they wished they had one. On the other hand, it seems rather extreme to suggest that every reader actively needs another reader to bring the process of reading to its natural conclusion; there are cases of autodidacts who built up prodigious reading records without much opportunity for discussing what they had read with anyone at all. Prisoners are one possible category of people who often survive for years as solitary readers.

Triangulation may not be a necessary condition of reading in its obvious, immediate, and verbal form of discussing a text during or after the reading. In its subtler versions, it may be more difficult to avoid the suggestion that some form of triangulation is inherent in almost any reading process. If we internalize previous conversations about reading, if they become part of the prior theory with which we approach the next text, then the referential importance of triangulation is increased. It may even be that we internalize previous reading as part of the triangulation process; the writer of any text read previously or subsequently is clearly able to take the place of "another reader," at least in the abstract sense.

It may be that we need to be clearer about the role of the other readers. It is probably not necessary, though it may be desirable, that the reader encounter other readers of *every specific text*. Any inveterate reader will read many books which are never discussed with anyone at all. If a reader never talks about books, however, never reads a review or a critical comment, never finds a way to hold his or her own interpretations up to someone else's, the way is wide open for massive and solipsistic misinterpretation to flourish.

Triangulation successfully accounts for at least part of the way in which reading remains socially rooted, even after it becomes a private performance inside the reader's head. Again, the implications for classroom practice are substantial.

The text

Most of the above description involves the practices and process which make up reading. Different texts invite different emphases and strategies. There are many generalizations about what specific elements of literary craft and technique may evoke in the way of reading behaviour, but the degree to which a general description is possible is highly limited. Any fictional text presents a combination of content and the many ways in which that content is offered, hinted at, repressed or exposed. We know very little about how readers transfer what they have learned about reading from one text to another. What does seem very clear is that the role of the text in the reading process should never be overlooked. Furthermore, the role of the text is never established solely in the terms of the words on the page; the text is always presented in some format and framework, and in the terms of that presentation lies a further shaping of the reader's attitude and response.

The terms of this study cannot be disentangled from the single text of *Wolf*. That book offers a particular kind of invitation to its readers, and the subjects of this study took up that specific invitation in different ways. They all acknowledged, for example, that the dream sequences were somehow related to the main story, even if they could not work out any form of meaningful connection. This kind of observation and insight was occasioned by the arrangements of the text; it would not have been possible in the abstract, nor would it have occurred in the same way with a different text. We can only read one book at a time; even those readers who keep several books on the go and alternate between them must actually read the book they hold in their hands for the time that they hold it. Any helpfulness of generalizations about reading is weaker when the importance and the singularity of the text is ignored.

Issues for further research

Reading style

Exploring the reactions of readers during their reading of an unknown text produced many interesting findings but also raised questions that might be investigated in further studies. The issue of reading style merits further study. I am uneasy about the reductive potential of some approaches to studying reading: labelling readers with a ruling "identity theme" as Norman Holland has attempted, or funnelling all responses through the filter of their relationship to some political abstraction such as the concept of patriarchy offers the potential for new insight but at the same time renders much of the messiness of real reading invisible. The issue of reading style can be more open-ended. It did seem clear that many (not all) of the readers in this project had a predilection for a particular kind of approach to the text of *Wolf*: affectively engaged, detailed and careful, oriented to the verbal arrangements of the text, or whatever. The virtue of studying reading style is that the evidence lies in the transcripts, not in some theory or analysis external to the reading.

Wider reading and reading over time

It would also be interesting to set up a larger study which explored some of the inner workings of a reader's relationship to texts along the lines of the work outlined here but which expanded the range of texts and made room to explore the changes which attend a reader's development over time. Would Candace, for example, bring such a wealth of personal and emotional identification to a different novel? Would she read in the same way at the age of 18 as she does at 14? How much of her very distinctive response to *Wolf* is a feature of her own reading style and how much is a factor of the meeting between that reading style and one particular story?

The impact of conversation

Another possible topic for further study would be to expand from the individual reader to include some group discussion. For example, I would very much have liked to have brought all the senior high readers together to have a conversation about their readings of *Wolf*. Another individual interview after such a discussion, or some form of considered writing about the book would offer further scope for detailed insight into how somebody's reading develops after the actual reading performance has finished. This kind of investigation was outside the terms of my project, but the scope for expansion is obvious. Such triangulation as occurred in this study took place with me standing in for all possible other readers; it was sufficient to illuminate the readings in a new way but it was only a single kind of expansion on the reading itself.

Understanding fictiveness

One aspect of this work which suggests many interesting questions is the development of the understanding of how fiction works. How do young readers learn about imagining with words? How is this understanding affected by the kinds of fiction with which they take their first imaginative steps? How does early exposure to fictions in different media affect learning and understanding? Do contemporary children have a head start in coming to terms with postmodern or metafictional texts because of early exposure to picture books, cartoons, interactive CD-ROMS and the film of the book? The genesis of fictional understanding and its sensitivity to different forms and media is a large and important question which needs further exploration.

Limitations of the study

In my work with the theoretical accounts of reading and in my explorations of the responses of ten readers to a specific text, I have dealt with many aspects of the wide-ranging and complex phenomenon we call fiction reading. Nevertheless, even an enormous description such as this one has its limitations, and I would like to explore some of these limitations in this section.

Theoretical limitations

In terms of theory, this project has the usual limitation which attends most cross-disciplinary studies. I know only too well that experts in, say, possible world semantics, or in the cognitive psychology of reading, could easily improve on my account of what their discipline has to offer to our fuller understanding of reading. My defence is also the standard one for cross-disciplinary work: in the course of drawing on different fields of study to explore what light they may shed on each other, I have necessarily done less than complete justice to any one of them.

The impossibility of a textual map

There is no way of supplying a comprehensive and detached reading of *Wolf* with which to compare the readings of the students. In some ways this is a definite limitation but it is one to which there is no honest alternative. Readings may be more or less detached and objective but there is no such thing as a completely impersonal and definitive reading of a work of fiction.

The impenetrable invisibility of the reading process

When it comes to the practical work with the student readers, the primary and most important limitation is that the reading of the adolescents who participated in this study still, in many crucial ways, remains invisible. What they provided was a kind of simulation of their mental processes; the retrospective think-aloud procedure was certainly illuminating but there is no way that it provided access to every fleeting response of any reader. This problem is an insuperable one; I list it because we must keep remembering that our understanding will always be limited.

These restrictions are unavoidable. There are other limitations in this study which are more deliberate.

Issues of selection

The number of readers is small and I made no attempt at a random selection. The criteria which I asked cooperating teachers to apply were fairly loose but not completely open-ended: I made it clear that I wanted readers of both sexes and not just the star readers of their classes. The specification which probably had the greatest impact on the study was that I asked for readers who would be likely not to give up partway through the book. Probably as a result of that request, all the participants in this project had enough background as readers to know how to perform with a novel. This knowledge permeates every aspect of their responses.

I am aware that this factor is a limitation on the study in some ways; the decision is vindicated or otherwise by the quality of insight offered by the ten readers who did participate. Both their self-descriptions and their behaviour as readers suggest that they came to the study with a considerable range of reading experience and competence. The justification I offer for this selection approach is the *post facto* suggestion that we probably would not have learned more from a group of readers selected by any other method. The individuality of the readers shone through even their most unanimous responses, and it is difficult to imagine a kind of representative individuality as generated by random selection.

Background information

This project does not attempt to provide any insight into the social, psychological or institutional backgrounds of the readers who participated. All ten were students within the Edmonton Public School System, in Grades 8 and 11 respectively. They have little else in common but I have not attempted to explore their individual histories. There are several reasons for this decision. One is simply that this project was enormous enough without adding many more layers of data. A second factor was my view of what is possible. I am comfortable with the challenge of exploring text and individual response. I am not, however, satisfied that a methodology actually exists which could provide truly helpful labels for the situations of these different people. There are vocabularies which purport to describe social categories, psychological conditions, ethnic backgrounds, reading levels. I am not persuaded that any of these vocabularies offer real precision and certainty: I suspect that they are as likely to offer a false confidence as to be truly illuminating. Furthermore, there does not appear to be a way of cross-referencing these vocabularies which is not even more reductive; do we start selecting for a subject with a particular socio-economic background, a specific psychological identity theme, *and* a required racial mix? In any case, even if a very sophisticated categorization scheme does exist, I do not have the competence to administer it. This being the case, questions about background had the potential to be intrusive without a corresponding potential to be enlightening. The information which the readers supplied about themselves stands as the main source of data about what led them to the stage they had reached at the time of our encounters.

The influence of the text

One of the starting premises of this study is that the text being read greatly influences the actual processes of reading. My interest was in the interaction between words and reader, an emphasis on the *now* of the encounter rather than on the history and background of any one reader. Holding the text constant made it possible to make comparisons between different individuals and the ways in which they responded to specific words on the page. At the same time, of course, it limited the study very severely. I would be fascinated to observe these readers in action with different texts and to explore what changed and what stayed the same in their reading styles and articulated responses. That kind of insight will have to await another occasion.

The role of schooled responses

There are many points, especially in the responses of the high school readers, where the impact of schooling can be inferred. This study makes no attempt to explore the ramifications of that impact, except in very indirect ways. The high school students came from two different schools, from the classes of three different teachers (four if you count the fact that Keith had been in his current class for only three weeks) and from a variety of previous school experiences. Tracking down the significant influences would be an extremely difficult and probably fruitless exercise.

I simply do not have enough information to answer questions about why the junior high students manifested less school-flavoured behaviour: used less technical vocabulary, made fewer references to other classroom texts, were less detached in their approach to the novel. It would take a much larger study to reach any kind of conclusion on this subject. The junior high students came from two different schools and were taught by two different teachers. I suspect, but I do not know for certain, that these particular junior high schools place rather less emphasis on an analytical approach to literature than the high schools I visited. I also suspect, though again I have no solid supporting evidence, that developmental issues are a feature here, that the older adolescents are simply better able to make use of a more detached vocabulary to discuss their reading. This is probably one of the many cases where development and schooling are so entwined that nobody can now describe what might be "natural" behaviour.

Triangulation

One serious limitation of this project is that these readers had too little opportunity to talk about the book with anyone other than me. Joanna said she described the book to her brother, but no one else mentioned any kind of discussion at all. It would have been fascinating to have been able to bring the group of ten readers together, but the complications of school timetables made that impossible. How these readers might have altered their opinions of various aspects of the book in conversation with peers is a subject which must remain unexplored. The questions raised by this issue are exciting and important, but they are not addressed by this work.

These limitations seem to me to be an inevitable consequence of the nature and organization of the study I did make. My emphasis was largely on what happens *during* reading. It would be fascinating to know more about the readers, both in terms of before this study (how they came to be the readers they are), and in terms of after this study (how they will move on to other reading and further development). However, no project can do everything. I decided to train the spotlight as closely and carefully as possible on what occurred *as* the readers read, and there is no doubt that a vast amount of data (I would argue rich and fascinating data) was the result.

Pedagogical implications

When I started the first interview with each reader, what I asked him or her to do was to read each chapter and provide me with an action replay of what had been noticed during the reading. The transcripts provide the material form of this replay, this retroactive think-aloud protocol.

As anyone knows who has ever watched televised sports, one of the chief uses of an action replay is the slow-motion potential it offers for analysis after the event. I believe that this kind of insight has been one of the benefits of this study. In the classroom, however, there is no chance for action replay and certainly never any version of slow motion. Pre-planning is important, the teacher's agenda sets the framework, but the class interaction takes on a life of its own. With thirty readers at work together, each with a different point of engagement, a different set of priorities and tastes, and a different attitude to just what should be accomplished in the English classroom, there is no space for the kind of leisurely analysis of private reading experiences which I have attempted here.

Nevertheless, I think that this project raises many points which may prove fruitful in the classroom as well as in our theoretical understanding of how reading works. I want to explore the pedagogical implications of some aspects of this dissertation. What can we learn which will help us in our dealings with experienced readers and with less skilled and enthusiastic students?

Engagement

The readers in this study wanted to perform well. They had been singled out from their classmates and were curious about what kind of project was involved. Their motivation to become immersed in the story was probably higher than it might be in an ordinary classroom. At the same time, the circumstances were hardly usual or low-key, despite the efforts I made to render their reading as close to normal as I could manage. (I made a point, for example, of reading my own novel as they read silently, so that they would not imagine that I was watching them read. This also had the intangible advantage of creating more of an atmosphere of silent concentration in the room, a kind of reader's quiet.)

Manifestly, despite the many markers of the singularity of the occasion, the ten readers did manage to step into the bounded world of the story of *Wolf*. Even in the first response to the first chapter, their questions were about detail rather than about the general outline of the story. They explored the fictional parameters but they did not raise issues of the generally fictive nature of the book. They described specific and limited misunderstandings, but at no point did anyone make any remark along the lines of, "I just don't get this." *Wolf* seems to have offered them an open door, not a blank wall.

Greg and Candace, in particular, offered descriptions of what they do with books they expect not to like: Greg reads faster and faster, skips, abandons. Candace starts off being suspicious and winds up being engrossed in the book even if she anticipated disliking it. Clearly there is a sort of switch which may or may not be operating, as a reader decides on a stance towards a book.

Is there any way in which teachers can get a hand on that switch, increase the likelihood that students will engage with a fiction? Any English teacher has probably encountered a student whose response to a particular text is utterly unengaged, indifferent or even hostile. Is there a way of surmounting that obstacle? If not, how can we acknowledge the significance of the fact that a student's meeting with a text was actually an uncommitted one? How much does this matter, for the student, for the teacher, and for the validity of any assessment of a student's work with a book?

We cannot legislate engagement. Indeed there are those who seem to suggest that, as teachers, we should almost be wary of it. There are, of course, other important priorities in literature teaching: the need to develop ways of recognizing and legitimizing resistance to texts, the need to understand how writers use words and structures to gain particular ends, the need to open discussion on the limitations of particular texts and particular perspectives, the need to pay heed to how we may be co-opted by a text, and also the need to investigate the writer's tools of performance. All of these issues are significant, both in terms of individual development and emancipation and in terms of democratic stays against textual manipulation of various kinds.

Such issues are highly important and should not be overlooked in the English Language Arts curriculum. The reality of many classrooms, however, is that students do not really know how to be engaged by a text which offers more than a simple and highly emotive plotline and which does more than reinforce their laziest stereotypes. A text which stretches readers is readily perceived as work; the challenge for teachers is to make opportunities for it also to be perceived as pleasure.

Daniel Pennac describes what happens when an adolescent reader is assigned reading homework in a book he cannot come to terms with (in this anecdote, it is *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens).

> Now he is a reclusive adolescent in his room, faced with a book he cannot read. His desire to be elsewhere creates a smeary film between his eyes and the page. He is sitting in front of the window, the door closed behind him. Stuck on page 48. He can't bear to count the hours it took him just to get to this forty-eighth page. The book has exactly 446 of them. Might as well say 500. Five hundred pages! If only there were dialogues. No such luck! Pages stuffed with crowded lines between two narrow margins, dark paragraphs balancing one on top of the other with, now and again, the meager charity of a line of speech. A set of quotation marks like an oasis: one character is speaking to another. But the second character doesn't answer. Here comes another twelve-page block! A dozen pages of black ink! It's suffocating! Like being at the bottom of a mineshaft! . . . . A book is an extremely dense object. It gives you no way in. It doesn't even burn very well. Fire can't slip between its pages. Not enough air in there. (1992/94, 20 - 21)

Even the most avid reader will probably recognize this unhappy picture. Is there any alternative? Readers do have to learn conventions from outside their own era; they do have to learn to persevere when the shaping and force of the story is not obvious; they do have to learn to find ways to live with and enjoy the estranging tactics of some authors; they do have to learn to cope with the different social and story-telling mores of writers from different cultures. If there is not this kind of growth and development, students face two possibilities: one is to be trapped inside the blockbuster circle where every convention is known and only the ramifications of specific plots ever vary; and the other is to stop reading.

W.H. Auden wrote about this problem in his book of essays, *The Dyer's Hand*. He suggests that, in adolescence in particular, there must be times when readers' reach exceeds their grasp.

> A child's reading is guided by pleasure, but his pleasure is undifferentiated; he cannot distinguish, for example, between aesthetic pleasure and the pleasures of learning or daydreaming. In adolescence we realise that there are different kinds of pleasure, some of which cannot be enjoyed simultaneously, but we need help from others in defining them. Whether it be a matter of taste in food or taste in literature, the adolescent looks for a mentor in whose authority he can believe. He eats or reads what his mentor recommends and, inevitably, there are occasions when he has to deceive himself a little; he has to pretend that he enjoys olives or *War and Peace* a little more than he actually does. (1963, 5)

The difference between Auden's adolescent and Pennac's, of course, is that Auden's is a volunteer. Both describe the outcome of what we might call triangulation in advance; an adult has proposed (or commanded) an encounter with a particular book. Auden suggests the ensuing struggle with an overwhelming text is an inevitable part of maturing; Pennac suggests it is self-defeating. Both of them are probably right some of the time.

Max van Manen says that the true pedagogic value of a novel lies in the double experience it offers: "It provides me in an intimate way with a great human experience and then, as bonus, offers me the phenomenological experience of interpreting the first one." (1985, 186) In other words, there is the valuable experience of the reading and then the pleasures of a kind of meta-reading, a reflection on the original reading. For students in the classroom who do not experience the intimate engagement with a great human experience in the first place, the second, interpretive experience will also be limited, possibly confusing, almost certainly unhelpful.

This study is not the occasion to develop a long list of strategies which might increase the element of pleasure in required reading, although one or two possibilities may be mentioned. Reducing the requirement that all students in a class read the same book at the same time increases the chance that more students will find some way of making a connection with the book they do read. Even a very restricted choice of titles does offer students some sense of control over the commitment they must make to a text. There are ways of organizing small group work which offer many of the benefits of a whole-class experience as well as further virtues of their own. Making room to acknowledge students' own choices of reading material also registers the importance of the need for some kind of affective link in reading. In the early days of the GCSE examination (the national examination for 16-year-olds) in the United Kingdom, for example, in the late 1980s, there was a section of the English literature syllabus which gave credit for wider reading; this feature has been lost in the endless reshuffling of requirements which the British government has imposed on the school system but while it was in place it received many favourable comments.

One important strategy, sometimes overlooked in classes for secondary students, is the simple one of reading aloud. The human voice can animate a text, can supply a sense of what is crucial and what is supplementary in a story, can differentiate characters who seem interchangeable when they lie flat on the page. Even reading the opening chapter aloud will sometimes be enough to set other readers inside the world of the story.

Teachers do need to introduce students to material which they would never read on their own; there may well be times when immediate engagement must be forfeited in the interest of opening possibilities which students may begin to aspire to. Nothing about this area is ever simple, and I would not want to suggest that there are any simple solutions available to the problems I have raised. Ideally, readers will benefit from exposure to texts which enlarge their ideas of fiction and of possible reading practices while experiencing real enjoyment at the same time. We all know how few books there are which reliably offer such an experience to thirty readers at a time; teachers are famous for the eagerness with which they seek material with the potential to succeed on such terms.

One final suggestion comes from what Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch called "wise words" when he quoted them in 1920. He was reading the preface of Gammer Grethel's translations of the Grimm brothers' *Household Tales* when he found this remark: "Our imagination is surely as susceptible of improvement by exercise as our judgment or our memory." (quoted in Quiller-Couch 1920/45, 44) The potential for application of this hint in the classroom is, of course, enormous.

Automaticity

It would probably not be difficult to gain a consensus among teachers and theorists of literature that automaticity in word recognition is a good thing and indispensable to any thoughtful reading process. I suspect that there is scope for fruitful consideration of the role of automaticity in other reading activities. I also suspect that the inability to deal with units larger than words, phrases and short sentences at a level of automaticity is a serious and ongoing problem which interferes with the reading success of many school students and many adults who are technically fully literate.

The idea that you need to be able to do a great deal of reading work without paying any conscious attention seems anomalous, somehow, a contradiction to the idea of thoughtful and careful reading. To many teachers, automaticity in reading, if it exists as a concept at all, is irremediably associated with the idea of worthless reading of the kind they don't want to encourage. I suspect in many cases the idea of automaticity is corrupted by a false connection with issues of content and moral value in the debates which surround writers such as V.C. Andrews or R.L. Stine.

The idea that the most sensitive and alert reader cannot pay attention to more than one idea at a time can be startling and disconcerting. Many teachers, familiar to saturation-point with a novel they have taught many times, may convey to the students in their classes the idea that a *good* reader can take in everything at once. This idea is as discouraging as it is invalid, and I am not suggesting that teachers deliberately set out to mislead their students so drastically. Nevertheless, there is a very real danger of students grasping the wrong idea and giving up before they have even properly begun to develop large-scale automaticity.

Momentum and accountability

Experienced readers usually know how to work out a balance between the need to establish some accuracy in their reading and the need to develop enough momentum to keep going. Classroom practices which take over that function, by decreeing how the reading and responding shall proceed in temporal terms, deny those students who do not read on their own initiative any chance to develop a feeling for this balance. Knowing how to establish this balancing point is one of the implicit strategies of reading which cannot be defined by rule or convention but which must be worked out in practice. The standard parallel example of learning how to ride a bicycle operates on exactly the same need to make a personal balancing point between care and momentum. You cannot describe it or make rules for it; you must perform it and practise it.

There are certain classroom practices which run the risk of erring in favour of momentum and those which privilege concern for accountability. Student journals, written as they read, often provide valuable information for the teacher and, in some cases, offer a route to illumination for the student as well. There is a serious risk, however, that decreeing the number and timing of journal entries may seriously interfere with the reader's ability to establish a working momentum in the text. Independent readers, who know what momentum works for them, have often been known to forge the journal entries after the event when the timing requirements of the teacher become too restrictive.

There are many other kinds of interruption to a relatively organic reading process, ranging from the utterly sterile list of comprehension exercises to the stop-and-predict approach. Some readers like to anticipate explicitly; others find it an interference with the experience of meeting the events of the book along with the characters. In any case, it is the timing of such work that I am querying here.

Teachers will no doubt argue that many students, left alone to develop their own sense of momentum, will simply not finish the story. That is almost certainly true. The question which remains is how they may ever expect to develop any sense of the need for this momentum if their reading is always working to somebody else's decisions about stop and go. There is no simple answer, but that does not mean that the question is not important.

It is possible, also, to imagine a classroom which values momentum at the expense of accountability. There are certain kinds of reading workshop approach which do not make enough room for reflection and discussion of a particular text with other readers. Having to account for your interpretation to someone else is not necessary for every book you read, but if you never have to defend your opinions in discussion with someone who has also read the same text, you run the risk of your reading activities turning into a form of self-fulfilling prophecies. It is possible, too, that some forms of comprehension exercise ironically undermine the very concept of accountability they were designed to foster. The most likely culprit is the multiple-choice question which rules out possible interpretations by simple omission, even as it sets a "best answer." Even more subtle kinds of questioning, however, may favour a simplistic analysis which simply does not do justice to the potential for emotional and intellectual nuancing in the text. Such teaching and assessing strategies surely undermine the whole idea that we owe our best and most thoughtful attention to a text.

Many teaching activities appear to emphasize the post-reading work more than the dynamic experience of reading itself. There are virtues to this approach but they come at a cost, and I think we do well to consider that cost when we plan our classes. Everybody knows that post-reading work is classroom stuff; a reader would never expect to perform the same kind of activities in private reading. What are the consequences of that knowledge?

Triangulation

The concept of triangulation seems to me to hold considerable teaching potential, as long as it is not abused by turning into some version of, "You tell me your response and then I'll tell you the right response." At its best, it offers a way to honour the dynamics between accord and individuality which are at the heart of reading itself.

Aidan Chambers, the novelist, teacher and publisher, has devoted much of his working life to the exploration of useful ways of listening and talking to children about their reading. In his latest book on the subject of conversation about books, he suggests three positive roles for book talk: the sharing of enthusiasms, the sharing of puzzles or difficulties, and the sharing of connections and discovery of patterns.

It is in the area of triangulation that we see a potential role for reviewers and critics; not all conversations about a text need to be oral. Chambers paraphrases W.H. Auden on what critics can offer to the conversation; they can:

> 1. Introduce me to authors or works of which I was hitherto unaware.
> 2. Convince me that I have undervalued an author or a work because I had not read them carefully enough.
> 3. Show me relations between works of different ages and cultures which I could never have seen for myself because I do not know enough and never shall.
> 4. Give a 'reading' of a work which increases my understanding of it.
> 5. Throw light on the process of artistic 'Making'.
> 6. Throw light upon the relation of art to life, to science, economics, ethics, religion, etc. (1993, 30)

This useful summary of how critics may contribute to the conversation outlines ways in which we may find our reading altered, our sensibilities refined, by someone else's contribution to our experience. Chambers goes on to suggest that young people not only benefit from the contribution of knowledgeable critics and teachers in their own lives; they may actually behave as critics as well. Children and adolescents introduce each other to new authors. They can persuade others that they have undervalued a book. Given the chance to explore and research, children may make connections with other cultures and times. Children and adolescents certainly can provide interpretations of books which increase the understanding of other people. They are often intrigued by the artistic process which goes into the making of a text. And, within the limits of their own experiences, their capacity to relate art to life can be very sophisticated and subtle. (1993, 38 - 40) In his respectful account of what children have to offer to each other and to adults interested enough to listen to them, Chambers describes a very active and productive form of triangulation. Adults may have wider knowledge but the interaction need not and should not be all one way.

It would be imprudent to generalize from a sample of ten readers, but I feel, nevertheless, that there is pedagogical potential to explore in the interaction between the rules of notice and the rules of signification which appeared in this study. Do readers in a group notice the same things in a text but attend to them differently? Is this an area where conversation may be particularly fruitful?

If triangulation is perceived as a useful pedagogical tool, questions of timing and tactics need to be considered. How far should readers be left to a private experience with a text before the conversations begin? What are the best ways of encouraging students to value all three elements in the triangulating process: their own reactions, the evidence of the text and the opinions of other readers? What procedures are most helpful in the classroom?

There is plenty of evidence about the value of classroom discussion about literature and I do not propose to reiterate it here. This study does not really explore much of this territory, but the evidence of what happened when the readers had to account for their reading even to one other individual, me in this case, suggests that much of value may be accomplished by talk and reflection.

Finally, there is the important question of how much a teacher might contribute to a discussion in advance of the reading of a text. Put this baldly it sounds absurd, yet we all know how much pre-reading activity goes on in classrooms. With the clear vision of hindsight, it is possible to look at how a reading of *Wolf* might be facilitated by advance information.

The pleasure of the discovery of the Red Riding Hood element in the book was so great that I would be very hesitant about announcing anything about this aspect of the book before students began to read, thus undermining their ability to work it out for themselves. On the other hand, almost all of the discussion about squats and their occupants was not fruitful in any literary sense and it would make sense to defuse this distraction with some advance explanation.

It seems relatively straightforward to assume that Cross expected the idea of squatting to be part of her readers' repertoire, whereas she expected them to know about "Little Red Riding Hood" but not to start off looking for it. We are hovering on the edge of the intentional fallacy here, but it seems as productive a way as any to look at how a teacher might lay the groundwork for the reading of a novel. The questions, "What did the author want readers to experience? How can I make that experience more available to my students?" are questions which have the virtue of being text-based and open to judgement.

There are grey areas in any text; the winter aconite represents one such area in *Wolf*. At the very least, the teacher might point out how much information Cross herself provides in the first dream sequence. This is a fine example of a tactic which can't do any harm and might do some good. Having worked in such detail with the transcripts of what these readers accomplished for themselves, I am newly enamoured by such considerations.

The whole question of facilitating someone else's understanding is such a delicate one that it is almost impossible to make generalizations. Ideally, teachers could detect when the ability to suspend judgement was turning into a form of frustration, or worse into a suspicion that the reader is too stupid to "get" the story. Of course, in real life and large classes, such nuanced observation is impossible. Like every other kind of reading, class reading exists as practice and can only be pre-planned up to a point. The delicate question is when and how to supply support that does not interfere with or even spoil the students' own sense of discovery.

Re-reading

Four of the ten readers (Hami, Greg, Keith and Joanna) were adamant that they would not ever re-read for pleasure, that only the pressures of school assignments would get them to return to a text once finished. Two readers (Christine and Candace) are happy to re-read their favourite books, often many times. The evidence of the transcripts is not clear-cut either way about the remaining four, though there is some suggestion that Ed and Brenda will re-read voluntarily. With Denise and Joanna, the question is academic in any case, because they read so little in the first place.

Are those readers who resolutely never re-read missing out on an essential literary experience? Christopher Collins, distinguishing the poetic from the hermeneutic interpretation, suggests that re-reading offers a different kind of experience from that made available by the single read.

> These graphic signs unfold a linear artifact that because of the reader's prior encounters with it is information unconstrained by the ordinary rules of linear time: this reader remembers the immediate textual past, that is, what was read a minute or so ago, but is endowed also with the extraordinary ability to remember the future, for example, how a text will end. For example, as rereaders of Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale,' we know even in the first stanza that the bird's song will modulate from 'happiness' and 'full-throated-ease' to a 'plaintive anthem' at the end. As a result we sense this final forlornness brooding within each earlier moment of hectic joy. We 'know' a reread poem just as we know a familiar ritual. . . . This privileged knowledge permits us to be meditatively present within, as it were, the interiors of such performances and to construe their component elements as copresent signifiers. (1991, xiv - xv)

We cannot legislate pleasure any more than we can legislate engagement, but it is worth raising the question of how many of our high school readers, in particular, would regard such a capacity to be re-immersed in a text as a *pleasure*? Most of the high school readers mentioned the need to re-read for the requirements of a paper or an assignment, but it was clear that such a project was regarded as work. I suspect that, for many adolescent readers, even many who enjoy reading, there is a line drawn between the *enjoyment* of reading once, of consuming and abandoning, a fiction, and the *task* of reading again, reading more closely, in order to marshall a considered response for the purposes of some outside agency such as teacher or examining board.

Are there ways in which our pedagogy can encourage the development of an attitude towards text which values for its own sake the different kind of reading which comes when the reader is at one and the same time projecting into the time of the tale and also anticipating a known outcome? Or should we regard the difference between those who do and do not re-read as one more example of individual style and preference?

Collins makes a case that single readings are in many ways inadequate, speaking of reading as

> itself the product of spontaneous interpretive choice, deliberate misreading, invincible ignorance, or simple inadvertence. . . . [E]very encounter with the text is a partial realization of its inherent factors. (1991, xvii)

This issue is not a problem for those who read again, who re-engage with the text

> for without this incompleteness, which is always a necessary result of selective attention, selective in part among mutually exclusive constructions, there would be little incentive to repeat the reading performance of this text on another occasion. (1991, xvii)

At the very minimum, it seems to me, it is useful to point out to adolescents who are still maturing as readers that a thoughtful, enjoyable re-reading is possible and that it has its own virtues. There is more to reading than finding out the end of the story. On the other hand, not every book is worth reading twice. And there is more than one way to re-read. Let us look at one example. Of the ten readers, Keith was the only one who did not describe some encounter with series books in his past. The plots and the endings are slightly different in most of these series books but the essential repetitiveness was recognized explicitly by nearly every one. The junior high readers, who were closer to their series reading days, were particularly scathing on the topic of the limitations of such reading, and yet such books clearly have something to offer.

I am not really offering any serious pedagogical answers to the question of re-reading, but I do suggest that the topic is an important one. We know that the division between books you read and books you study is already a substantial one in the minds of many students. It is not a division that is necessarily a healthy step on the path to adult reading.

Levels of context

Reading always occurs within a wider situation. Readers approach a text with specific life and intertextual experiences. The text arrives within the framing of one provenance or another. There is a particular level of post-reading accountability built into the framing.

The students in this study were participating in one kind of institution: a university student's research project. This took place within the wider framework of daily school life; they were selected by their English teachers, in most cases they left their English classes to participate, and the tapings took place inside the school (although I did attempt to mitigate the effects of this framing by having them do some of the reading at home). They were only partly clear about the responsibility that would devolve upon them as participants in this study and some of the early dialogue in the transcripts involves clarification of exactly what I was asking of them.

Similarly, in the early part of the year, students must work out the expectations of their new teacher. Jonathan Culler has a suggestion that seems extravagant at first sight but which offers some useful insights for both teachers and researchers.

> [T]he reader's experience--at least in interpretations--is always a fiction: a narrative construction in a story of reading. Study of readers of various sorts has resulted in a wide range of stories of reading, narratives of what happens to the reader as he or she encounters the sequence of words. When students write papers about novels they frequently proceed by imagining a reader--what it would be like to be a reader--and cast their papers as fictional narratives of what 'the reader' feels, perceives, realizes. The fiction of a reader is absolutely central to the reading of fiction. (1988, 204)

To some extent, in the institutions of the research project and the institutions of the classroom, we are bound by the limits of how readers find ways to create the fiction of their reading experience. We are back to the old problem: the experience itself is invisible and irreproducible. What we can do is offer ways of opening up the limits on how this experience can be expressed.

Teachers as readers

William Powell quotes Darrel D. Ray's observation about reading: "the act of reading is one of the few human behaviors that cannot be learned through imitation of others performing the act." (quoted in Powell, 1973, 177) At one level, this observation is profoundly true; imitation of visible reading behaviour will lead to a limited outcome. At another level, however, readers have no option but to imitate the behaviour they see modelled for them; they must make judgements about the purpose and value of what other people do as they deal with texts. Teachers, of course, are particularly likely to make certain kinds of reading behaviour explicit, to articulate what it is they think they are doing. Long after readers have passed the stage of learning to decode individual words, they are observing their teachers and other readers around them for hints about what makes reading successful.

Some of the implications of this fact are probably invisible to most of the participants, including, quite often, the teacher. It is hard to remain constantly aware that others are observing every nuance of your actions and drawing conclusions which might seem quite alien to you. Nevertheless, students do watch their teachers and reach conclusions about what reading involves.

In many classrooms, there is a discrepancy between the activity of the teacher and the activity of the students: the students are encountering a text for the first time and the teacher is re-reading a text, sometimes one which he or she has encountered many times before. Students are probably aware that the teacher is more familiar with the text than they are but this may not stop them from assuming that the teacher's strategies in approaching the text should be adopted by them too. In fact, although students may gain a great deal of practice in starting an unfamiliar text and coming to terms with the way it works, they may actually have very little chance to observe how an *experienced* reader approaches an entirely new text.

There are other ways in which the teacher plays an important role in the development of reading strategies among pupils. One well-belaboured element in the English teacher's role, in particular, is the duty to be a good example, to enjoy reading, to manifest a genuine enthusiasm for new titles and suggestions. If the issue of engagement is important in fiction reading, then the teacher's sense of engagement should be an important example to students. This commitment to the text is easily idealized; not all classes are equally eager to develop the kind of atmosphere where teachers feel ready to display their real literary enthusiasms.

The issue of reading style deserves a brief mention under this heading as well. There is certainly not enough evidence in this study to be definite about the role or importance of different styles of reading. However, it seems clear that some readers laid greater importance on the need for momentum, while others stressed the need for accuracy. With such small numbers it is impossible to be categorical about the differences between those who placed greater weight on the doings of the characters and those who paid more attention to the workings of the text. These differences may be developmental or simply individual. What does seem clear is that there is more than one way to read a single book, and teachers should be wary of assuming that the way *they* happen to read is the natural way of going about things.

Curriculum

This study has concentrated on the complex activities of individual readers. How can we best use any insights it develops to improve our decisions for general progress in the teaching of the English language arts? How do we prepare the ground so that the best kinds of insights shown by these readers can be encouraged? How do we reduce errors of interpretation without damaging readers' confidence in their own ability to maintain that delicate balance which sustains a reader in a story?

In the course of conducting and describing this research project, I was impressed many times by the insights of individual readers, given space and time to reflect on a reading. The question of making room in the English class for this kind of attentive engagement is the one which finally strikes me as most important. The adolescent readers had much to contribute to a conversation about *Wolf*; they also appeared to develop their own insights in the course of holding that conversation, even when they were the ones doing most of the talking.

Arthur Applebee has described "a view of curriculum as defining a domain for culturally significant conversations into which we want our students to be able to enter." (1994, 47) One conversation of significance to readers may actually involve some reflection on their own reading processes. All of the readers in the study appeared to be quite knowledgeable about their own reading strategies, even when these were not articulated explicitly. Similarly interesting observations came from the group discussion of ways of reading *Wolf* which followed the pilot study. Students (and maybe also some teachers) are not even necessarily aware that not everybody employs the same strategic approach to a text.

Jack Thomson is clear about the value of the conversations he held with the subjects of his research project in Australia.

> At the end of the interview all the students expressed some satisfaction in their newly acquired knowledge of their own reading powers. It also became clear that once readers become reflexively interested in their own reading processes they can be helped to progress to higher levels of reading, if the order of development is preserved in the teaching. (1987, 180)

Such developments are not achieved in unison; no conversation flourishes when each participant speaks the same words. Making room for and creating an atmosphere of genuine respect for individuality in the classroom, and allowing time for individuals to compare and contrast their particular approaches to text may seem like a nebulous kind of curriculum. Nevertheless, any attempt to regiment readers' ways of approaching texts is likely to founder on the kinds of individual strengths, weaknesses and preferences described in this study.

Conclusion

It is time to return to the research question which opened up this project:

Readers explore fictional texts in ways which are learned and conventional and simultaneously in ways which are personal and idiosyncratic. A text enables and constrains readings in ways which are also both conventional and individual. What can we learn about how people read through an exploration of a single, rich, literary text combined with an investigation of the readings of specific adolescents meeting that text for the first and the second time?

From the outset of the study, I have struggled with the wording of that question even when every other aspect of the project proceeded smoothly. Despite my best efforts, I could not think of a way to phrase the question that would account for all the rich detail of the reading process. As it stands, the question pays insufficient heed to all the ramifications of reading and also to the process of re-thinking and re-working which accompanied my inspection and analysis of the results. The material gathered through my own multiple readings of *Wolf* and the students' individual endeavours produced the basis for insights, but, in the end, the insights did not spring fully-clad from the raw material. They passed through a wardrobe-room of theories, descriptions, preconceptions, assumptions, and suggestions. In the end, the problem with that question is that, as with every other text, I cannot read the text of the transcripts with a new and innocent eye. I interpreted the interpretations of the students intertextually, in the light of all the other information about reading which I amassed over a period of some years. The question makes it sound simple; the truth is, as ever, complex.

I have made as clear as possible the intertextual network on which my interpretations are based. I have been as explicit as I know how about the way in which I looked at the texts of the student responses. I have reproduced as many of their own words as the fabric of this dissertation would sustain. And, after I have finished writing, the readers of this work will approach it with yet another layer of knowledge, beliefs and attitudes which will make the whole process even more complicated and intricate.

When I was a little girl, I was spellbound by the kind of picture that recedes into infinity. A child reads a book and on the cover is a picture of a child reading a book and on the cover of *that* book is a picture of a child reading a book. It goes on as far as the eye can see, a version of *mise-en-abyme.*

So it seems to be with this study. Each layer peeled back reveals another layer. At the heart of the reading process, the reader meets the text. But both reader and text are rooted in an intertextual network of conventional understandings and assumptions. These in turn are filtered through social and psychological screens. Reader and writer are both shaped and restricted by such invisible energies as unconscious desires and fears, and ideologically formed assumptions and priorities. Psychological and ideological forces do not come labelled and apparent; they weave their way into the reader's own schemata, both cognitive and affective, and often appear in disguise. The institutional framework which surrounds the meeting of reader and book has its own impact, as does any arrangement calling for a particular kind of feedback or report on the reading. The content of the story is woven by specific words in a particular order and the rhythms and pauses of that arrangement create their own impetus. The reader must respond with the capacity to deal with the specific words, to reach a balancing point between momentum and accountability, to decide how to focus the scarce resource of attention while processing other information automatically. The reader must constantly make decisions about splitting and grouping the data of the text, so that it can be stored usefully and accessibly in the working memory. No reading is perfect; the reader must contend with making inadequate assumptions, with forgetting, with being mistaken. At some point there may be the opportunity to discuss all of this with other readers; no wonder what makes it into explicit conversation is likely to be the merest fraction of the whole messy event.

The word *conclusion* which heads this final section suggests that we may expect to reach some kind of closure on the subject of reading. I have provided a large and complicated description of the processes at work in this activity, but I already know that I am nowhere near the possibility of offering closure. E.B. Huey said in 1908:

> [T]o completely analyze what we do when we read would almost be the acme of a psychologist's dream for it would be to describe very many of the most intricate workings of the human mind as well as to unravel the tangled story of the most remarkable specific performance that civilization has learned in all its history. (quoted in Anderson and Pearson, 1984, 255)

I do not pretend to have succeeded in this considerable challenge. Huey's description of the task, however, makes me feel more comfortable about the idea of refusing closure. The complete image of reading recedes like the picture on the book cover; exploring it closely with a magnifying glass simply seems to offer the idea that there are always more layers to understand.

Eco says,

> There are two ways of walking through a wood. The first is to try one or several routes (so as to get out of the wood as fast as possible, say or to reach the house of grandmother, Tom Thumb, or Hansel and Gretel); the second is to walk so as to discover what the wood is like and find out why some paths are accessible and others are not. (1994, 27)

We can read to find out the ending, to get the instructions, to ascertain the final definition of what reading is about. Or we can read to enjoy and explore the wood.

When it comes to the work of this dissertation, there is a sense in which I have been looking for answers. But even when reading and taking notes on the most efferent and information-laden reference text, I have been sustained by a sense of interest in the territory for its own sake. Looking at reading from many different perspectives, including the perspectives of individual developing readers, has been an enterprise which, for me, existed for its own sake. Even when it is haunted with nightmares and shadows, the wood is full of delight. Reading is a complex cognitive, affective, cultural, social act. Story connects us with our own world, with other worlds, with possible and impossible worlds. Exploring how the connection is made, how the words on the page turn into the images which people our minds, is a project which will not come to a neat and tidy ending.

It seems only fair to return to *Wolf* for a suitably open-ended conclusion. Lyall, the storyteller, is weaving the narrative spell, and even the resistant Cassy is drawn in. Even before the words start to make sense, the magic connection is being made.

> Lyall's voice met her half-way. Not his ordinary speaking voice, but something richer and darker and deeper. Even before she could make out the words, it sent a long, fascinated shiver across the back of her shoulders. (64)

When we have exhausted our cognitive, affective, cultural and social understandings, in the reading of fiction there still remains something "richer and darker and deeper." We may not be able to describe it completely, but we can acknowledge and respect and enjoy it.

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APPENDIX A

WOLF

(Reproduced at 78% of actual size)

Of course Cassy never dreams, Nan always said. *She has more sense, to be sure. Her head touches the pillow and she's off, just like any other sensible person. There's been no trouble with dreams, not since she was a baby.*

CHAPTER 1

He came in the early morning, at about half past two. His feet padded along the balcony, slinking silently past the closed doors of the other flats. No one glimpsed his shadow flickering across the curtain or noticed the uneven rhythm of his steps.

But he woke Cassy. She lay in her bed under the window and listened as the footsteps stopped outside. There were two quick, light taps on the front door. Then a pause and then two more taps, like a signal.

Cassy sat up slowly. She heard the door of the back room open and Nan come hurrying out. Not running (*nurses never run, except for fire or haemorrhage*), but crossing the tiny hall in two quick strides.

The front door handle clicked, but no one spoke and no light from the hall showed under Cassy's door. He came in quickly, in silence, in the dark, and the door closed behind him at once.

He and Nan crept into the back room and for a split second Cassy caught the sound of his voice, but she couldn't make out any words. Then the door swung shut and both voices merged into a steady, muffled drone, matching the drone of traffic that floated into Cassy's other ear, from the West Way.

She lay down again and closed her eyes, wiping her mind clean and willing the questions away. *Mind your own business,* Nan always said, *and you won't get your nose caught in my mousetrap.*

No questions. No thinking at all. The blankness came easily, from long practice, and she floated into a dreamless sleep.

When she woke up again it was morning. Nan was standing at the foot of the bed, beside the chest of drawers. On top of the chest, level with Nan's face, was the big, framed photograph of

Cassy's father as a little boy. Both of them stood very straight, shining clean, but not smiling. Mother and son.

Nan was staring straight at Cassy, but the boy's eyes were gazing into the distance, fixed on something beyond the picture. For a second, floating up out of sleep, Cassy wondered what it was.

Then she saw the old brown suitcase in Nan's right hand.

She sat up and frowned, trying to ignore it. 'Why are you still here? I thought you had an early.'

'I was sick,' Nan said. She looked Cassy straight in the eye. 'In the night. They don't want me at work like that.'

Cassy looked straight back, still avoiding the suitcase. 'I'll go and phone Sister for you.'

'No need,' said Nan. 'I'll get Mrs Ramage to phone later on. There's other things for you to do.' She knelt down, laying the suitcase flat on the floor in front of the chest of drawers. 'You'll be better off at your mother's, until I'm over this.'

'Oh, Nan!'

Don't you want me to stay and look after you? Cassy was supposed to say that next. Then Nan would smile and shake her head, lifting the neat piles of clothes into the case. Step by step, word by word, they would go through the same pattern as last time—and all the times before. And at the end of the pattern Cassy would be leaning out of Goldie's window, waving goodbye to Nan. With the brown suitcase lying on the floor behind her.

When she was three—or four?—she had jumped on to the suitcase and banged on the window with her fists. 'Don't leave me here! I want to go with you, Nan!' Even now, the memory brought a ghost of that panic. The miserable terror she had felt as she stood at the window, with Goldie trying to cuddle her, while Nan disappeared round the corner. She never shouted like that again. Better to wave and smile, and pretend it was all right.

But why did it have to happen?

'Why *now*?' The words burst out, even though Nan frowned at her. 'We have to choose our options tomorrow, and I'll never get what I want if I'm not there. Why have I got to go *now*?'

'You don't need a reason to visit your own mother,' Nan said

sharply. She opened the catches of the case with a hard, metallic click. 'It must be six months since you saw her.'

'But my options are *important*. You said they were. You said I had to choose very, very carefully.'

'That's as may be,' Nan said. Her voice was cold, and she didn't look at Cassy. 'But there's more to life than school. Now get up and get yourself washed.'

Briskly she opened the first drawer and began to take out Cassy's clothes. Three vests, worn thin but washed white. Six pairs of knickers. Two good jumpers and one with a darned elbow.

But Cassy wasn't ready to give up yet. She stared stubbornly down at the half-packed suitcase.

'I want to know what this is all for. *Why* have I got to go so suddenly?'

'There's no time to spare for chattering,' Nan said. She folded a navy-blue school skirt into three, precisely, without looking at Cassy. 'Stop asking questions and get yourself washed.'

Cassy pushed her feet into her slippers and padded towards the bedroom door. As she stepped into the hall, she glanced quickly at the door of the back room. It was shut. Of course. She had never said anything to Nan, or tried to work out the connection in her own mind. But she knew that the strangeness of the closed door went with the strangeness of the suitcase.

She couldn't remember when she had first noticed, but it was always like that. Usually, Nan insisted on keeping the back room door open, to air the room. It was her bedroom as well as the sitting room, and she hated it to smell of sleep. Even though it faced the front door, it was always wide open.

Except when the brown suitcase appeared. Then, suddenly, the back room door would be closed and Cassy knew that she must leave it alone. The only time that Nan had ever smacked her was when she had touched the handle once, to see what would happen.

Today, because she was angry, she stood and stared at it. The back of her neck tingled. She wanted to march across to that door and fling it wide open, to let in the fresh air.

But, out of the corner of her eye, she could see Nan watching her. She was sitting back on her heels with her hands in her lap, looking at Cassy with narrowed eyes. Waiting for her to turn away from the back room and go into the bathroom.

Cassy shut the bathroom door tight and glared at her reflection in the mirror. Sensible brown eyes. Sensible short brown hair. You only had to look at that face to know she wouldn't do anything wild. *If everyone was like you*, Nan said, *the world would be a simpler, sweeter place*. Sometimes Cassy wished being sensible wasn't so important.

She washed twice as fast as usual, but even so Nan was calling before she had finished. 'What are you doing in there, child? Your breakfast's ready.'

'Coming.' Cassy folded her towel and hung it on the rail. Then she walked out of the bathroom. 'What shall I do with my pyjamas?'

'Put them in the wash,' Nan said, from the kitchen. 'I've packed some clean ones. Then get dressed and come to have your porridge.'

By the time Cassy walked into the kitchen, her porridge was out and her tea was poured. Before she had even sat down, Nan was pushing the milk and sugar at her and talking about the next thing.

'I've put up a bag of food for you to take. Will you manage that as well as your suitcase?'

Cassy stopped, with a spoonful of sugar in mid air. 'Why have I got to carry them both? Aren't you going to come with me?'

'And why would you need me to hold your hand? You may not be very big, but you're almost fourteen,' Nan turned away quickly and began to run water into the porridge saucepan. 'I don't want to be running around on trains. Not in my state of health.'

'But you *always* take me.'

'Maybe it's time you were growing up, then,' Nan said. But she spoke in a strange, offhand way. She was thinking of something else.

Cassy sprinkled the sugar and poured the milk. The porridge stuck in her throat like cotton wool, but she ate it just the same, watching Nan unzip her battered old purse and count out the train fare on to the table.

As the last ten pence went on the top of the pile, Nan hesitated for a moment, her fingers hovering. Then she pulled out a crumpled note and laid it down beside the coins.

'You can take that, too. Just in case. But don't spend it unless you have to. And don't let your mother know that you've got it.'

Twenty pounds? But that was a huge amount of money. Cassy put her spoon down and stared at it. Nan had never given her that much before.

'Why on earth—?'

But there was no chance to ask. Nan went straight on talking, in her briskest voice. 'Put it away now, before you lose it.' She pushed the money across the table to Cassy. 'And there's a letter for your mother, too.'

The envelope was sealed and Nan had written *Goldie* on the outside in her small, cramped writing. Cassy picked it up and zipped it into the pocket of her skirt, with the money. As she tucked the twenty-pound note away, she took a deep breath, and spoke very fast, before Nan could interrupt.

'I am coming back? Aren't I?'

For one terrifying second, Nan hesitated. Cassy grabbed the edge of the table and gripped it hard.

'I haven't got to go and live with her for ever?'

'Don't talk nonsense!' Nan snapped. 'You live here, with me. Always have, and always will. You're just going to your mother's until—until I'm better.'

'But can't you say how long it's going to be?'

'I'll write. And you must write to me.'

Nan stood up and went to the drawer by the window where she kept her bits and pieces. She found a packet of plain white postcards and counted out twelve stamps to go with them.

'There you are. I want to hear from you twice a week, now. No need to write an essay, just a note about how you're going on. And keep writing, mind, even if—if I've got no time to write back.'

Cassy took the postcards and turned them over in her hand. They were comforting, in a way, because they meant that Nan wanted to hear from her. But there were a lot of them. Twelve. If she used two a week, they would last her for six weeks. She couldn't imagine what it would be like to live with Goldie for six weeks.

'I'll put them in my case,' she said.

'That's right,' Nan nodded. 'Best to get going now. No point in hanging about when you've a journey to make.'

Moving was better than thinking. Cassy stood up, holding the postcards and the stamps, and walked out into the hall. She did not even glance at the closed door of the back room. It was none of her business. All she had to do was finish packing.

When she flicked the suitcase open, the heaps of clothes looked back bleakly at her. Plain, practical clothes, well cared for, but wearing a little thin. Sensible, unobtrusive things that would never stand out in a crowd.

As she laid the postcards on top, she realized that she had nothing to write with. It was no use relying on Goldie to have a pen, so she turned to take her school pencil-case, from the top of the chest of drawers.

It was lying next to the picture, and the solemn little boy caught Cassy's eye. She picked up the photograph and tilted it to the light, wondering, for the thousandth time, where he was now. Were his eyes still fixed on something that no one else could see? What did he look like?

Mick Phelan.

She shaped the words with her lips, making no sound. Knowing, as she had always known, that they must not be spoken out loud.

'Cassy!' Nan called from the kitchen. 'What are you at? It's time you were on your way.'

Guiltily, Cassy grabbed the pencil-case and, barely realizing what she was doing, crammed photograph and pencil-case, both together, in on top of the postcards. Then she slammed the top and flicked the catches shut.

'Just coming!'

She put on her school mac, pulling the belt tight, and carried the suitcase out into the hall. Nan was waiting by the front door, with the old shopping bag in her hand. She held it out.

'There's a few bits of food for you. Goldie won't have anything in, if I know her, and you'll need a square meal tonight.'

Cassy took the bag. 'What have you put in here? It weighs a ton.'

'It's good solid food for a growing girl,' Nan said. There were two bright pink patches on her cheeks and she was talking faster than usual. 'Now you take good care of it, mind. Don't you go handing it over to Goldie. Keep it all in a good, safe place. Be sure—'

But she did not go on. Instead, she put a firm hand in the middle of Cassy's back and pushed her gently towards the door. 'Don't dally around now. Go straight there. You must know the way well enough.'

'Oh yes. I take the Tube to—'

'Well, there's no need to spell it all out.'

Cassy blinked at the sharp edge to the words. Then she leaned forward to kiss Nan's rough, squashy cheek. 'Don't worry about me. I'll be sensible. And if she's moved, I'll track her down. Bye.'

'You're a good girl.' Nan laid the back of her hand softly against Cassy's cheek. 'Be patient,' she said in a low voice. 'Things will work out.'

The gentleness startled Cassy into silence. Before she could work out what it meant, Nan had taken her hand away, stepped back inside and shut the door.

For a second Cassy stood staring at it, but all she could see was her own reflection in the little glass pane. There was no point in waiting.

She had more sense than to knock on the door again. A couple of years ago, she had quarrelled with Goldie and run away home. When Nan saw her standing on the doorstep, she had sent her straight back, even though it was getting dark. Without a meal or a cup of tea to warm her up. Without even letting her through the front door.

Pulling up the hood of her school mac, Cassy buttoned it firmly under her chin. Then she picked up the heavy suitcase and the shopping bag and set off, a short, determined figure with her head held high.

CHAPTER 2

It took her all day to find Goldie. When she knocked on the door of the bedsit in Notting Hill, a strange woman opened the door. *Bother*, thought Cassy. But it wasn't the first time Goldie had moved without telling them and she knew what to say. She had heard Nan say it often enough, to other strangers.

'I'm very sorry to bother you, but I'm looking for Susan Phelan. Did she leave an address with anyone?'

The woman frowned. 'Dunno. You could try the old guy in the newsagent's. Can't think of anyone else.'

That meant lugging the suitcase and the bag down the road and round the corner, but it was worth it. The man in the newsagent's had a crumpled piece of paper under the counter. He didn't hand it over easily, of course. They never did.

'Daughter?' he said, suspiciously. 'There wasn't no daughter. She lived in that room all on her own.'

'I live with my nan,' said Cassy. 'At least—'

The man looked at her case and chuckled. 'Been evicted? That's what happened to Goldie, too. Rent arrears.'

'And where did she go? Please?'

'We-ell—' The old man looked hard at her and then held out the piece of paper. 'I suppose it's OK. She went off with that boyfriend of hers.'

'Boyfriend?'

'Black man from a squat over in Clapham. She said they worked together.'

Cassy couldn't imagine Goldie working, but she smiled politely, put the piece of paper in her pocket and headed back to the Tube station.

The squat in Clapham had been knocked down, but the people across the road had another address, in Wandsworth.

The squatters in Wandsworth were very helpful indeed. They gave Cassy three cups of tea and an iced bun and asked her lots of questions. Then they told her how to get to the squat in Lambeth where Goldie had gone. ('She helped Lyall and Robert set it up,' said the man called Earl, grinning at the joke.)

By the time she walked out of Lambeth North Tube station, Cassy was exhausted. She had been bumped on the escalators, sworn at as people pushed past her case and followed by an old man with a dirty beret. She was cold and hungry and thirsty and it was getting dark.

But she kept walking. The sides of her hood, like blinkers, shut out the view on either side and her feet moved steadily, with a rhythm of their own. She was beginning to feel that she would never find Goldie. She would just go on and on travelling, from one dingy place to another, until her money was all spent.

By the time she reached Albert Street, the darkness and the hunger and the endless walking had made her light-headed. When she turned the corner, the road ahead of her looked unreal, as if the tall shabby houses were painted on cardboard. She plodded past them, without thinking about the boarded-up windows and the tangled gardens full of rubbish.

Number Forty-Four looked worse than the rest of the row. The boards had been taken down from its bay window and the space behind was very dark. The side alley that led through to the back garden was even darker, and clumps of withered plants straggled against the front wall. Everything was grey or black or dull, shrivelled brown.

Except for two patches of startling colour.

The first was parked outside the house. It was an ordinary Ford Transit van, but it was painted with wild, rainbow shapes. Two elaborate trees twisted up the back doors, climbed round the windows and overflowed on to the roof in an intricate pattern of twigs tangled with stars.

Striding across the side of the van was a pair of vast, giant legs that towered upwards to lose themselves in the stars. Their feet were enormous, but above the ankles they narrowed quickly, stretching up and up, unbelievably tall, until they disappeared into the tree branches on the roof.

Across the legs arched a single word, painted in bold black letters:

MOONGAZER

Cassy stared at it for a second. Then she walked up the front path of the house, towards the other patch of colour.

It was a large notice, stuck up beside the front door. Someone had painted a lively border of flames and weapons and monsters round the edge, but the writing in the middle—carefully protected by polythene—was in stiff, legal language:

TAKE NOTICE it began

THAT we live in this house, it is our home and we intend to stay here.
THAT at all times there is at least one person in this house.
THAT any entry into this house without our permission is a CRIMINAL OFFENCE . . .

No need to read it all. She had seen squatters' notices often enough before. Nan would have sniffed and pinched her lips together to keep the comments in, but Cassy was too tired to disapprove. She skipped the formal words and let her eyes travel straight to the bottom of the sheet.

Signed Lyall Cornelius
Robert Cornelius
Susan Phelan
The Occupiers

At least she had reached the right place. There was no mistaking Goldie's round, irregular writing, with every letter painfully formed. Cassy put down her case and pressed the bell-push.

Nothing happened. After a moment she pressed it again, listening more carefully, but there was no ringing inside the house. The knocker had gone too, and someone had nailed a piece of wood across the letterbox.

In the end, she hammered on the door with the flat of her hand. The thuds were hollow and dead and it was hard to believe there were people inside to hear them. But when she stopped banging she heard the noise of feet running down bare, wooden stairs.

The steps changed, slapping on to tiles, and came right up to the front door. But the door didn't open. Instead, someone spoke from the other side.

'Who is it?'

It was a boy's voice, deep but ragged. Cassy straightened her hood and picked up her suitcase.

'I'm looking for Goldie—for Susan Phelan. Is she there?'

'Who are you?' The question was impersonal. *As though he's filling in a form*, thought Cassy. But that didn't irritate her. It was easier to be business-like.

'I'm her daughter. Cathleen Phelan.'

'Wait a minute.'

He marched down the hall and up the stairs, leaving Cassy to shiver in the dark garden. It smelt of damp earth and rotting leaves, as if she had strayed out of London into a wilder place. When a lighted bus rumbled across the top of Albert Street, it seemed to be moving in another world.

The feet came back. Two heavy bolts slid open, one above Cassy's head and the other level with her feet. Then the hinges creaked as the door swung backwards into the shadows.

The boy was older than she had expected—fifteen or sixteen—and it was hard to make out his face in the darkness. He stepped out of the way politely as Cassy walked into the chilly hall.

'Goldie's up there.' He waved his hand at the stairs. 'Go on up. Don't bother to wait for me.' Shutting the door, he began to tug the bolts back into place.

Cassy walked slowly down the hall, still carrying her suitcase and the bag. It was too dark to see much, but the house had the cave-like smell of mould. The tiles felt broken and uneven under her feet and when she touched the wall loose plaster crumbled away from her fingers.

All her life she had been coming to visit Goldie in places like this. Places with greasy floors and cobwebby ceilings, where smells hung on the stairs and the corners were clogged with dirt. But she had always come with Nan before. And with Nan's scouring powder and scrubbing brush and disinfectant, ready to clean everything up. This time it was different.

She climbed the stairs, plodding heavily from step to step, heading for the light that shone, very faintly, on to the landing. It was coming from the room on her right, at the back of the house. Heaving her case another couple of feet, Cassy tapped lightly on the door.

'Come in!'

That was Goldie's voice, giggly and excited. Cassy pushed the door open, took one step—and stopped in confusion.

It was like walking into an infinite forest, full of fireflies.

The darkness flickered with points of flame that dipped and swelled all round her, retreating endlessly. Between the flames were dark flowers and flashes of colour that defied her eyes and teased her mind. Were they large or small? Near or far?

The room had no limits. Left and right, behind and in front and above, the lights and the flowers surrounded her with patterns that destroyed her sense of space. The shock of it froze her brain and she gripped the handle of her suitcase, standing completely still as she worked out where the boundaries were.

It took her more than a minute. Slowly she realized that she was looking at reflections. The only real lights were two candles, standing in bottles in the middle of the floor. Their flames were reflected backwards and forwards, over and over, up and down, in a hundred fragments of mirror.

There were pieces of mirror stuck all over the walls and the ceiling. Some were coloured, some were engraved or bevelled or painted and some were plain. Some were stuck flat to the wall and some were set at an angle. In every piece, the flames danced differently.

Dozens of pieces of cloth were draped round the mirrors, hiding the sharp straight edges and filling the gaps with shadowed images. Sombre flowers were overlapped by plain, dark cloth, and dim leaves twined in and out of dusty velvet. Here and there a few silver folds gleamed white, like silver birch trunks in a wood of yew and holly.

Behind the flames, between the tree trunks, among the shadows, there were human shapes, infinitely reflected and repeated like the candles. But, like the candles, only two of them were real. Slowly Cassy turned to face them.

Goldie was sitting on a mattress in one corner, as still and upright as a doll in a glass case. A black, fringed shawl lay round her shoulders, and her long golden hair was combed over the silk, straight and gleaming. Beside her, cross-legged on the floor, sat a tall man. A stranger.

Old, thought Cassy first. Not a boyfriend at all, but a man of fifty or more, with a lined, black face and a fringe of grizzled beard. And *thin*. Bony ankles and bare, long-toed feet. Long, long fingers, spread suddenly wide as he smiled at her out of the dark forest.

'Hallo, Little Red Riding Hood.'

For a moment she could not take her eyes off him. His narrow lips were taut round the dark cave of his mouth and his body was as tense as a hunting animal's, in the moment before it springs. He was waiting for some answer that she did not know how to give.

She put down her case and the bag, and tugged the hood back briskly, off her head. 'I'm Cassy,' she said. And then, to Goldie, 'Hallo, Mum.'

Goldie clapped her hands. 'Oh, Cassy! How lovely! I wanted you to come! Do you like my beautiful room?'

'Very nice,' Cassy said. She marched over to the mattress, delivered a firm, sensible kiss and suffered the strangling hug that Goldie always gave her.

This time it was shorter than usual. Goldie glanced past her, nervously watching the door. 'Where's Granny Phelan? You haven't left her downstairs, have you?'

'She's not here.' Cassy tried to ignore the smile and the way Goldie relaxed, suddenly, into the cushions. 'But she sent you a letter.' Unzipping her skirt pocket, she held out the envelope.

Goldie smiled again, but she made no effort to take the envelope. Instead, the man beside her leaned forward and tweaked it out of Cassy's hand.

'That's not for you—'

But he had ripped the letter open and was reading it, peering at the words in the half-light. As he reached the end, he snorted and looked up at Goldie, his face twisted with disgust.

'Does she always treat you like this?'

Goldie's smile faltered. 'Like what?'

'Giving orders.'

He jumped to his feet and read the letter aloud in a grotesque, shrill voice, wagging his finger sternly at her. Round the room, a hundred other fingers wagged in time with it, exaggerating the mockery.

'You must keep Cassy with you until I send for her! Make sure she has proper food and clean clothes! Send her back when I write and say so!—No explanation. Nothing about money. No please or thank you.' He glared at the paper, then screwed it up and flung it into a corner. 'It's unbelievable! She just tells you what to do.'

Goldie smiled, vaguely, but Cassy felt like shouting. *You have to tell Goldie what to do! Or she'll just sit there and let the mess pile up round her.* This man must know that, if he lived with her.

He spun round suddenly and fixed his bright, dark eyes on Cassy. 'What's it all about? Why have you just turned up like this?'

Cassy stared back stubbornly. 'I don't know.'

'You don't know?' He raised his eyebrows and spread his hands wide. 'You mean—you woke up this morning and—wham!—you were sent off to stay with Goldie? Out of the blue?'

'That's right.'

'And you didn't ask why?'

'It's none of my business,' Cassy said flatly. Meaning, *It's none of yours.*

Goldie yawned. 'Don't fuss, Lyall, It's always like that. Cassy comes for a bit and then she goes away again. It's always happened, ever since she was old enough to walk and talk. Why should I mind? I *like* having her.'

'But you've never wondered about it?' Suddenly Lyall was very still, and the room was still with him.

'Why should I?' Goldie shrugged and smiled. 'Does it matter? She can stay, can't she?'

'Of course she can stay!' Lyall said impatiently. He strode to the door and bellowed, 'Robert!'

Feet thudded on the stairs and the boy was there in the doorway.

'Yes?'

'Cassy's staying.'

Lyall flung an arm round her shoulders, catching her off balance. She staggered against him, feeling the ridged hardness of his ribs and the warmth of his body, and automatically she shrank away.

'What's the matter?' he said, glancing down at her. 'Tired?'

It was an easy excuse and more true than Cassy had realized. 'I've been travelling round and round looking for Goldie. All day.'

'Then you need a bed,' said Lyall. He waved a hand at Robert. 'Fix it up, Rob.'

'It's all done,' Robert said calmly. 'I've put the spare blankets in the front room downstairs.'

'Brilliant! Give her a hand with her bags, then.'

Robert picked up the suitcase in one hand and the shopping bag of food in the other and nodded at Cassy to show that she should follow him. She stepped out of the door and peered into the shadows on the stairs.

Robert was sure-footed in the dark, but she had to feel her way carefully. By the time she reached the bottom of the staircase he was already in the room at the front. She walked warily after him, prepared for more strangeness.

But it was an ordinary, empty room. Some blankets were piled on the bare boards and a fireplace gaped dustily in one wall. Robert had hooked an extra blanket across the bay window, but the upper panes were uncovered, letting in the dull glow of the street lamps. Automatically Cassy reached out and clicked the light switch.

Nothing happened.

'We're working on the electricity,' Robert said. Not apologetic, but proud. 'They won't connect us, but Lyall thinks he knows a way.'

Cassy smiled weakly, trying not to look disapproving, but Robert didn't seem to notice. He put down her bag and her case and went on with enthusiasm.

'It'll be a really good place if we get that. We've already got water. And a toilet down the hall that sort of works.'

'Oh,' said Cassy. She knew all about toilets like that.

'The kitchen's not very well organized, but we've got lots of food in. You're welcome to raid it, if you're hungry.'

'Not now, thanks.' But the mention of food reminded Cassy of the shopping bag. *Don't you go handing it over to Goldie,* Nan had said—but Robert was different. She picked up the bag and held it out. 'You ought to have this. It's some food that Nan sent, to help with my keep.'

'Great. Thanks.'

Robert took the bag and peered inside, spreading the handles wide Cassy had a momentary glimpse of carrots and baked beans and tinned ham. And, at the very bottom, something smooth and yellow that she couldn't identify. (Bananas? But Nan wouldn't have put those under the tins.)

'Brilliant,' said Robert. He grinned and slung the bag over his arm. 'Anything else you want now?'

When Cassy shook her head, he padded off down the hall, towards the kitchen. Wearily she slid her feet out of her shoes and opened her suitcase to find the things she needed straightaway. Sponge bag. Pyjamas. Towel.

The photograph on top slid sideways and she caught it just before it hit the floor. It had better go on the mantelpiece at once, out of harm's way. She stood up and put it right in the middle, so that the solemn, boy's face stared down towards her makeshift bed. But not quite at it. However Cassy shifted the picture, she had never been able to make those eyes look at her.

They were still gazing across and beyond her as she settled under the blankets, wriggling to get herself comfortable on the hard floor. And when she closed her eyes, the solemn face jumbled with the rest of the day, making strange pictures as she sank into sleep.

* * *

. . . the sweet smell of pine trees was all round her and the ground under her feet was soft with needles. Layer upon layer upon layer.

There was no path through the forest. She turned slowly, gazing down alleys of trees. The lower branches barred her way, and the higher ones shut out the light.

The clearing was like a shout, raucous and shocking.

Bright blue sky. Bright green grass. And a patch of bright, bright yellow at the far edge. With the basket dragging at her arm, she began to push her way towards it, through the sharp branches.

The flowers sat close to the ground in their ruffs of frilled green leaves. Against the darkness of the pine trees, their yellow cups were as sharp as a challenge.

Winter aconites.

She stared at them, knowing—in her dream—that they had some other name. Some meaning that she needed to understand. But the word slid away like soap as she tried to grasp it and she could not remember.

She began to pick the flowers. . .

CHAPTER 3

And then she was awake. Quite suddenly, so that for a moment the dream stayed with her and she could smell the sharp scent of the pine needles.

As the forest faded, she opened her eyes to the bare room with its peeling wallpaper and the blanket across the window. It was bleak and dusty in the cold morning light, and her breath hung in clouds in front of her.

She sat up and began to wriggle out of her blankets. The moment she moved, she realized that she was ravenously hungry. Unrolling her mac, which she had used as a pillow, she stood up and pulled it on. Breakfast was what she needed. She opened the door and stuck her head out into the hall.

Everything was very quiet upstairs, but someone seemed to be moving around in the kitchen. There was a strong and appetizing smell of frying. Cassy walked down the hall and pushed open the kitchen door.

For a second she thought she was in the wrong place. She had been expecting dirt, because Goldie's kitchens were always filthy, but she hadn't expected rubbish and ruin. The room looked as though it had been wrecked by a maniac.

Half the floor was covered with smashed wood, fragments of lino and twisted pipes. All the kitchen fittings had been ripped out systematically and left in a heap, with the broken sink on top.

The back door was barricaded. Heavy strips of wood had been nailed across the frame and dozens of plastic bags and cardboard boxes were stacked in front of it. Even from the doorway, Cassy could smell stale cabbage leaves and rotten meat.

The only permanent, fixed thing was a tap. It hung in the air, about half a metre above the ground, attached to a new copper pipe that stuck up from the floor. In front was a plastic bowl with a dirty cloth in it, placed to catch drips.

Taking another step, Cassy saw the stove. It was a small gas camping stove, standing in one corner, on the floor. There was a black frying pan on top, with four rashers of bacon arranged in it. Robert was kneeling beside the stove, turning the bacon with a knife.

'Hallo,' Cassy said.

He looked up. 'You're an early riser, are you? A bit different from Goldie.'

Cassy imagined the list in his head.

Early risers: Robert Cornelius and Cathleen Phelan.

Late risers: Susan Phelan (and Lyall Cornelius?).

'No point in lying around,' she said. 'Not when there's things to do. Is there something I can have for breakfast?'

Robert looked at the four rashers of bacon. 'I'll put some fried bread in.'

He settled his knife on the edge of the frying pan and went to the nearest cardboard box to fetch the bread. Cassy pulled a face, thinking of food and rubbish side by side. But she knew what Nan would have done, so she did it.

Marching across the kitchen, she grabbed two of the nearest rubbish bags. 'Is there somewhere outside where I can put these?'

'The kerb.' Robert was busy fitting slices of bread into the frying pan. 'The dustmen come today. But you needn't bother. I was going to do it after breakfast anyway.'

Cassy ignored the last part and began to heave the rubbish sacks down the hall and out on to the pavement. She put them in the gutter, in front of the Moongazer van, and went back for more. By the time the fried bread was ready, she had made a tidy heap in the road. Four black plastic bags and two soggy boxes. Brushing off her hands she marched back into the kitchen.

Robert was lifting bread and bacon on to a plate. He glanced curiously at her. 'You may be small, but you're pretty tough, aren't you? Goldie would never have shifted those sacks. You're not much like her, are you?'

'Of course not!' Cassy took the plate as he held it out and settled herself down on the floor. 'Thanks very much.'

Robert shrugged. 'It's not exactly a feast. But it'll—keep the wolf from the door.'

He spoke the last words with a strange emphasis, like some kind of joke, but it obviously wasn't a joke for Cassy to share. She made a neat sandwich with her bacon and fried bread and glanced at the battered kettle beside Robert. 'Any chance of a cup of tea?'

'Sure.' He picked up the kettle and turned on the tap. The water came out in a great rush that set the pipe juddering. Putting the frying pan down on the floor, he balanced the heavy kettle on the little stove. 'Sorry there's no chairs. We've only been here two or three weeks and we've had a lot to get straight.'

'What sort of things?' As far as Cassy could see, they had spent all their time sticking up bits of mirror.

Robert put his sandwich down in the frying pan and began to tick things off on his fingers. 'Floorboards. Half of them were ripped up, to stop people using the house—Lyall almost fell down to the cellar when we first broke in. Roof. That was leaking quite badly. Water. We had to connect that before we moved in, because Goldie wanted a proper toilet.'

'Of course she did!'

Robert grinned. 'When we moved into the Wandsworth squat, the toilet was blocked up with concrete. And we had so many shows booked that we couldn't clear it for two weeks.' He took another bite of bacon and fried bread.

Cassy made herself go on eating, but she changed the subject. 'Shows? What sort of shows?'

'In schools, of course. Moongazer shows.' Robert looked at her. 'Don't you know what we do?'

'Of course I don't. I'd never even heard of you until I got here.'

'Well—' Robert looked down at his feet for a moment, eating steadily, before he went on. 'Lyall runs workshops—mostly in schools. Drama workshops, writing workshops, *thinking* workshops. It's hard to explain exactly what they are, but they're absolutely fantastic.'

'And Goldie works with him?' Cassy couldn't imagine Goldie in a thinking workshop.

'Sometimes she does. And I do as well, if he needs me. But mostly I do the research and keep track of the bookings and the money and all his tax.'

'But how do you have time? What about school?'

'I don't go to school much.' Robert grinned again. 'Only when they catch up with me.'

'But—'

'School's a waste of time. I've been running the business side of Moongazer for nearly three years now. On my own, more or less. You don't get that at school.'

'But there's other things—'

'Sure there are. Want to know what I've researched for Lyall so far?' He held up his finger again, making another list. 'South American history: in detail. Polar exploration: loads of scientific stuff in that one. Jungles: that was science *and* history *and* economics *and* world politics. And the thing I'm working on now spreads even wider than that.'

Cassy blinked at the volley of words, but he did not give her time to recover.

'I bet you don't know what a *ligahoo* is. Or what the Anglo-Saxons called January. Or what happened to Monsieur Seguin's goat. Do you?'

'I—'

'What spider ambushes its prey instead of spinning a web? What moth do you find in granaries?'

'That's not education,' Cassy said. 'Those are just little, isolated facts.'

'Oh no they're not!' Robert looked triumphant. 'They're not isolated at all. They're all linked to the same thing.'

He leaned close, waving his sandwich in the air.

'It seemed like a narrow subject when we started, but it covers millions of things. Big ones—ecology and history and the nature of fear—and silly little details as well.' He waved the sandwich again, hunting for an example. 'Like the folk names for sun spurge and club moss and winter aconite.'

Winter aconite. Something twanged at the back of Cassy's mind and, for a second, she stopped hearing Robert's voice. Her mind was chasing a memory that slid away faster than she could catch at it. A threatening, uneasy memory. *Winter aconites . . .*

Suddenly she didn't want to know what Robert was talking about. Shying away from the conversation, she glanced quickly round the kitchen and saw Nan's old shopping bag, tipped on to its side.

'Shall I take that away?' she said, abruptly. 'Is it empty?'

Robert blinked, his mind still on club moss and the nature of fear. Then he sprawled across the room and pulled the bag towards him. 'It's almost empty. But I didn't know what that stuff at the bottom was.'

'What stuff? I thought it was all food.'

Robert opened the bag and held it out for her to see. At the bottom, roughly wrapped in a piece of newspaper, was a solid lump of—something. One corner of the newspaper had fallen away, showing the smooth yellow patch that had puzzled Cassy the night before.

Reaching into the basket, she lifted out the bundle and pulled the newspaper away. The lump inside looked like Plasticine or marzipan, except that the colour was brighter. She prodded at it with one finger. It had a faintly oily surface.

'I thought it must have got in there by mistake,' Robert said. 'What is it?'

Cassy prodded again and the substance gave slightly, as though it could be moulded. 'I don't know,' she said slowly. 'I've never seen it before.'

'It must belong to your grandmother, mustn't it? Do you think she wants it back, or is it just a bit of old junk?'

Cassy frowned down at it. 'Nan doesn't have bits of old junk. She's not like that. I can't imagine how it got into the bag.'

'Can't you phone her up and ask?'

'But we haven't got a phone, and I can't bother—'

I can't bother Mrs Ramage, she meant to say. But somehow the words wouldn't come out. Sitting in that wrecked kitchen, with its dirty floor and its sour smells, she suddenly wanted, unbearably to talk to Nan.

Slowly, she ran her finger over the smooth yellow surface of the lump on her lap. She hadn't looked for an excuse to phone. It had come to her. Surely Nan would understand that.

'Where's the nearest phone box?' she said abruptly.

'Up to the main road and turn left. Want me to come?'

'No thanks. I'll be fine. Shall I wash up my plate?'

Robert shook his head, gathering the plates and frying pan together with quick, efficient hands. 'I'm quite used to washing up. I usually do it all. You go and make your phone call.'

Scooping the yellow lump into Nan's bag, Cassy carried it off to her room. There was no point in wasting time wondering what it was. She stood the bag in a corner and began to dress as quickly as she could, surprised at her own impatience.

Twenty minutes later she was standing in the phone box, dialling Mrs Ramage's number. As she waited for an answer, she rattled her fingernails against the glass and when the ringing stopped she spoke at once. 'Mrs Ramage? It's Cassy, from next door.'

'Cassy?' Mrs Ramage was old and slow and she took a long time to work things out. 'Where are you then, dear?'

'I'm in a phone box.' It was no use trying to explain 'Would you mind—could you possibly fetch Nan for me? I need to speak to her.'

'Well, I haven't seen her around for a day or two—'

'Please, Mrs Ramage. I'll ring off and phone back in a few minutes, shall I?'

'Yes, dear. You do that. I'll go and fetch her for you.'

Mrs Ramage put the phone down and Cassy stared through the glass at the dull grey sky. How long should she wait? Five minutes? Ten? Mrs Ramage didn't walk very fast.

After seven minutes she put in some more money and tapped in the number again. This time, the phone was answered at the first ring.

'Nan?'

'What?' said Mrs Ramage's voice.

'Oh. Is Nan out?'

'No dear, she's *in*. But she said to tell you she was very busy. And she sent you her best love.'

'She wouldn't come?' For a moment Cassy couldn't make sense of the words. She wouldn't have bothered Mrs Ramage unless it was important. Nan must have guessed that. So why—? 'Is she ill?'

'Oh, I don't think so. She looked quite well to me.'

'And she wouldn't come?' Cassy said again.

'I told you, dear.' Mrs Ramage began to sound faintly impatient. 'She said, *Tell her I'm perfectly well and not to worry,* *but I'm a bit tied up just now. Give her my best love and say I'm looking forward to getting a postcard.'*

'Oh.'

'Is that all right then? Or was there something else?'

'No . . . no.' Cassy gathered her wits. 'Thank you very much for going round. I'm sorry to have troubled you.'

'No trouble, dear. Any time. Goodbye.'

'Goodbye.'

Very carefully, Cassy put the receiver back into place. Then she stepped out into the cold air and took three deep breaths. *The world doesn't have to explain itself to you*—that was what Nan always said. All she needed to know about was the yellow stuff. And if that were important, surely Nan would have come to the phone.

But something else fretted at her as she walked back to Albert Street, with her face turned fiercely into the wind. It was only as she reached the house that she worked out what it was.

Nan shouldn't have been there at all. Not if she was perfectly well. It was only Tuesday—even though Monday seemed a lifetime away—and that meant she was still on early. She ought to have left the flat at six o'clock.

CHAPTER 4

Two strange things. The yellow stuff and Nan. Cassy was still wondering about them when she got back to the house.

'Did you find it OK?' Robert said, as he opened the door.

'What?' Cassy said vaguely. 'Oh yes, thank you.'

He stepped back to let her in. 'And what's the stuff? Is it important?'

'She—'

For an instant, Cassy was on the verge of telling him all about it. Asking him what he thought. But how could he understand when he had never met Nan? He didn't know how reliable and unchanging she was, and he must be used to much stranger things. Being Lyall's son.

'No, it's nothing important,' she muttered. 'But thanks for saying it.'

She gave him an absent-minded smile and went into her bedroom, shutting the door behind her. Then she opened her suitcase and found the neat packet of white postcards. It was certainly time to send Nan one of those. Nan still thought that Goldie was living in the bedsit in Notting Hill and that Cassy was with her. Instead of which—

Cassy looked down at the blank side of the postcard and shook her head. How could she fit everything on to that? She had only been one day away, but she could have written pages. About hunting for Goldie. About the house. About Lyall and Robert. But all that would have to wait for the next postcard, or the one after that. This time she had to concentrate on what was really important.

Her new address. *Never put your own address on a postcard,* Nan said. *It's just a waste of space.* But this was different, of course. Nan had to have her new address, so that she could tell her when to come home. Cassy made sure that she wrote it large and clear.

Everything else had to be squashed together underneath. It sounded very jerky, but it was the best she could manage.

> *This is a squat. Goldie is living with a man called Lyall and his son Robert. She's working(!!) It's not too bad. A bit messy. What shall I do with the yellow stuff that was in the food bag? See you soon. Love, Cassy.*

As she was writing her name at the bottom, she heard feet on the stairs.

'Cassy!' Goldie flung the door open and looked round it. 'Oh *there* you are! Hurry up, or you'll be late.'

'Late for what?'

'Making the masks, of course!' Goldie danced into the room. 'I *am* pleased you've come! It's lovely having you here to join in.'

She flung her arms wide, and Cassy shrank away from the hug.

'What masks? What are you talking about?'

But Goldie had taken a step backwards and bumped into Nan's shopping bag. It fell over, and immediately her mind jumped to something else.

'What's this yellow stuff, Cassy? Is it yours?'

Cassy pushed it back into the bag, out of sight. 'Mum! What about the masks?'

'What? Oh yes!' Goldie said, brightening. 'You must come and help.'

Cassy gave up trying to talk sense. 'I'll come in a minute. I've just got to go to the post.'

'Oh, no!' Goldie pouted. 'It's miles and miles to the postbox. And we've got ever such a lot of work to do.'

It was like arguing with a nagging child. Goldie never gave up once she had an idea in her head. If Cassy set off down the road, she would probably follow, tugging at her sleeve.

'Oh—all right. Hang on a minute.' Cassy pushed the postcard into her mac pocket, ready to post when she next went out. Then she picked up the bag and stood it neatly beside her suitcase and the folded blankets. The room might be bare, but it didn't have to be untidy.

'Aren't you coming?' Goldie said, from the doorway.

'I'm ready now.' Cassy followed her, shut the door and clattered up the stairs.

She had expected the others to be in the mirror room, but Goldie led her straight past the open door. The mirrors were lifeless in the dusty daylight and the draped cloth looked shabby. There was nothing left of last night's magic forest.

The front bedroom was completely different. It was the biggest room, stretching right across the front of the house, and someone obviously slept in one corner. There was a sleeping bag laid out tidily on a pile of folded blankets.

But the sleeping bag was walled off from the rest of the room by a neat row of cardboard boxes. Each one had a label stuck to the side, decorated with a picture of long legs, like the ones on the van. Over the legs arched the same word. MOONGAZER.

The main part of the room was used as a workshop. A roll of chicken wire stood in one corner, next to a box full of tools. Next to it, four half finished masks were lined up under the window. They were made of papier mâché, on a base of chicken wire, but it was hard to guess what they were meant to be. The papier mâché was still rough and the printed words, criss-crossing at random, confused Cassy's eye and disguised the shapes.

In the centre of the floor was a heap of newspaper. Lyall and Robert were sitting beside it, shredding the pages into neat strips and dropping them into a bucket. As Goldie and Cassy walked through the door, Lyall jumped up, in one energetic, fluid movement. He bounded towards them, with his arms held out.

'Have we got a new recruit? Are you going to help us, Cassy?'

'I—' Cassy took a step backwards, as though he might engulf her. 'What do you want me to do?'

'You could help me tear up the paper,' Robert began, but Lyall held up a hand.

'She's not slave labour! We want her to *share*—and she can't do that until she understands. Read all about us, Cassy!'

Cassy would rather have torn up paper, with Robert, but she smiled politely and took the leaflet that Lyall held out. Goldie beamed.

'It's the most fantastic thing! Moongazing! I like it best in the whole, wide world!' She stretched out her arms and spun round the room on tiptoe until she was dizzy and Lyall had to catch her.

Cassy looked at the leaflet. On the front was a photograph of Lyall, in a scarlet tracksuit. He was standing under a tree and the photograph had been taken from ground level, so that his legs and feet were huge and his head was impossibly small and far away. He seemed to tower up and up, into the tree and towards the clouds. MOONGAZER said the black letters, printed in an arch above the picture.

Inside, the leaflet was full of smaller, more ordinary photographs. All of them showed Lyall with different groups of children. In some, his face was exotically painted. He was a clown, a tiger, a monster with glaring eyes. In other pictures, it was the children who were disguised and Lyall who was watching.

> *Open new windows!* began the writing round the pictures. *A day with MOONGAZER will have children acting and writing and thinking as they've never done before.*
>
> *The whole world is his treasury. He combines history, science, literature and much, much more, drawing on the riches of Europe, the culture of the Caribbean, the wisdom of Africa and the mysteries of Asia.*
>
> *MOONGAZER has worked as an actor, a teacher, a potter and a musician. His amazing talents reach their peak in the work that he brings to schools and festivals, book weeks and play schemes.*
>
> *For further details. . .*

Cassy's glance jumped to the last picture of all. It showed two opposing groups of children. One group was led by Lyall, with a big wooden cross in his hand. The other group was led by Goldie. She was holding a golden sun-disc, with twisted, stylized rays, and she looked like a warrior angel.

Play-acting, thought Cassy. She ought to have guessed that Goldie wouldn't be doing real work.

When she looked up, she met Lyall's eyes. He was standing perfectly still, watching her, and his expression was sharp and shrewd. She had summed him up as a clown, a man who leapt about and played games, but there was nothing clownish about the way he was looking at her. She wondered, uncomfortably, if her thoughts about the leaflet had shown in her face.

'It's very interesting,' she said quickly, giving it back to him. 'What can I do to help?'

Lyall waved at Robert. 'How about helping him with the papier mâché? It's the last layer, but we're making four masks, so we need a lot.'

'Me too,' Goldie said, dropping to the floor beside Robert. 'I like doing papier mâché, even if it does make my fingers black.'

'And no one tears the paper as small as you do.'

Lyall swooped down to kiss the top of her head and Cassy turned away. Picking up a thick bundle of papers, she ripped them across, in half and in half again, so that they tore jaggedly into irregular pieces.

'Not like that.' Robert held up his own paper to demonstrate. 'It's better to get a rhythm going. Then all the bits turn out the same size, more or less. Watch Goldie. She's brilliant at it. Better than a machine.'

'That's because she turns her brain off while she does it,' said Lyall. He was crouching in the corner now, behind the chicken wire, but he grinned over his shoulder. 'You're good at turning your brain off, aren't you, Goldie?'

Goldie stuck her tongue out at him. 'You think I'm so stupid, don't you, Lyall Cornelius? But *I'm* the one who thought of this new show. Aren't I? It was absolutely all my own idea, and you said it was brilliant. Better than all *your* ideas. Or Robert's.'

'And so it is,' Lyall said. 'It's the best idea we've ever had. I can't think how it came out of that empty head of yours.'

Goldie gave a delighted, outraged yelp, threw her newspapers at him and bounded across the room. Flinging herself after the newspapers, she landed on top of Lyall and began to tickle him fiercely, while he laughed and struggled and Robert called out to them both.

'Mind the masks, you idiots! We'll never get ready in time for Friday if you squash them!'

Cassy didn't know what to do, or where to look. How *could* they? Goldie was grown up—even if she was odd—and Lyall was *old*. But they were behaving like a pair of children. She tried to ignore them, but that was impossible, because Lyall was screeching 'Mercy! Mercy!' at the top of his voice, and Goldie was laughing hysterically.

It was stupid to let her get like that. Couldn't Lyall see? *Goldie's all right as long as she doesn't get excited*, Nan said. *As long as she's calm, she's quite good at doing what you tell her.* But she was completely out of control now. No one would ever be able to stop her.

As if he had read Cassy's mind, Robert stood up. Stepping across the room, without any hurry, he grabbed the back of Goldie's jumper and pulled her off Lyall.

'You're going to squash the masks, Goldie,' he said. Perfectly quietly and kindly. 'And you'll be sorry when you've done it.'

Lyall stood up and Goldie sat back on her heels, giggling weakly. 'Give in,' she said. 'Go on, Lyall.'

'I give in,' he said solemnly.

'Say I'm brilliant.'

'I'm brilliant,' Lyall said. Then, as Goldie screwed up her fists and growled, he ducked his head. 'No, no, I mean you're brilliant of course, Goldie dear.'

'And my idea is the best idea *ever*?'

Cassy couldn't stand the nonsense any more. 'What is this brilliant idea, anyway?' she said. 'No one's told me yet.'

'You mean—you don't know?' Lyall flung his hands up in wild, exaggerated astonishment. 'I thought Robert would have made you sick of the word, already.'

'What word?' Cassy thought she would go mad if she had to live with Lyall very long.

'*What* word, she says!' Lyall shrugged elaborately and rolled his eyes towards the ceiling. 'As if the house didn't ring with it, all day long. As if Robert didn't murmur it in his sleep and write it in golden syrup in his porridge every morning. As if—'

'Knock it off, Lyall,' Robert muttered. 'You can see she's not used to being wound up like that. It's not fair.' He was still ripping paper, steadily and evenly, amid all the chaos. Without stopping, he turned to Cassy. 'What we're doing is—Wolves.'

Wolves—and winter aconite . . .

'Not *Wolves*,' Lyall said impatiently. 'That sounds like some kind of nature talk. It's *Wolf*, boy. That's what we're doing.' He spun round and grabbed one of the masks from the floor behind him. It was an awkward, ungainly shape, about a metre long, with faces from newspaper photographs spattered distractingly all over it. He waved it at Cassy. 'Look.'

Cassy looked, but all she could see was something like a giant, lumpy sausage, which widened out into a mask shape at one end.

'Wolves don't look like that,' she said.

'Exactly!' Lyall beamed, as though she had said something clever. '*Wolves* don't look like that. But *Wolf*—' and he beamed again, leaving the sentence unfinished.

Cassy hadn't got the faintest idea what he was talking about, but she wasn't going to ask. She had had quite enough of Lyall for the time being. Bending her head, she began to tear up newspaper, concentrating on the size of her strips and not taking any notice of anything else.

But later in the day—much later—the conversation came back to her, teasing her mind. As she lay down in her blankets that night, she wondered why she had been so sure. *Wolves don't look like that*. How did she know? What had she ever had to do with wolves?

She tried to make some kind of picture in her mind, but the image slid about shapelessly, splitting into disconnected fragments. A gaping, murderous mouth. Long yellow fangs. Sharp ears, lifted or laid back—

What *did* a wolf look like?

The question irritated her so much that she sat up and reached for her suitcase. She meant to find a pen and a piece of paper, so that she could try to draw the wretched animal.

But her hand touched the shopping bag instead of the case. It toppled towards her in the dark, spilling out the solid lump inside in its newspaper wrapping.

That would do. Better than paper, in fact, if she could really mould it. She began to work at it with her fingers, gradually softening it as she pinched and pulled and squeezed.

She needed a body, strong and deep at the chest and narrowing towards the rear. Four legs. A tail. And a head with pricked ears, turning slightly upwards, towards the moon.

Her fingers struggled, moulding and re-moulding, trying to find the exact shape that would answer the image in her mind, the shape that would mean *Wolf*. How did it go? Heavy and threatening? Or wider here? Or was it more delicate altogether, with a fine, narrow muzzle?

Long before she found a shape that satisfied her, she slid sideways on to the blankets and slept.

* * *

. . . the yellow flowers of the aconite lay scattered over the checked cloth on her basket. It was a red and white cloth, moulded into hills and valleys by the shapes underneath. The smooth hump of the new loaf. The circular tops of the custard cups. The long, smooth rod of the bottle's neck.

She stood with her back to a tree, in that stillness which makes movement impossible in dreams.

Where are you going? Can I show you the way?

The whispering voice caressed her ear, familiar but unrecognized. She could not turn to see who had spoken, and her mind danced away, refusing to make a picture of the face. But she knew the huskiness, and the warm breath, and the slow, enticing murmur that went on and on.

Shall I show you the path? We could play a little game . . .